

I AM IAUD LATIMER

By

John Shard

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I AM MAUD LATIMER

To
T. WERNER LAURIE,
WHO IS NO RELATION TO
BARABBAS

CONTENTS

BOOK I

| CHAP. | PAGE |
|-------------------------------------|------|
| I. A STRANGER PASSES | 9 |
| II. THE LATIMERS, <i>EN FAMILLE</i> | 33 |
| III. THE WORLD IS ALIGHT | 54 |
| IV. CROSS-CURRENTS | |
| V. INVITATION TO THE DANCE | 116 |
| VI. MARIONETTES' PARADE | 126 |
| VII. THE GODS DECIDE | 137 |
| VIII. THE DOOR IS SHUT | 163 |
| IX. LAUGHTER IN THE WINGS | 180 |

BOOK II

| | |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| I. ANIMALS IN CAGES | |
| II. EVIDENCE FOR THE PROSECUTION | 216 |
| III. THE BETRAYAL | 243 |
| IV. THE SUMMING-UP | 272 |
| V. THE VERDICT | 287 |
| VI. AFTERMATH | 294 |
| VII. DISHING UP THE DIRT | 298 |
| VIII. SHOW BUSINESS | 312 |
| IX. SHAFTESBURY AVENUE | 318 |
| | 340 |

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be much longer before I get my own back on old Wilberforce...
...he threatened to take me down to Sheepshanks to-night."

Pankhurst sniggered.

"That'd be nice for you! The blasted hypocrite! Here, did you hear the story about old Brown the other day?"

"About old Brown? No—what was it?"

"Well, you know old Brown's been in the Readers' Room practically since the world began? He's got five kids—and hasn't had a new suit for about eight years. His wife's just been ill—and I suppose he's got into debt, poor devil. Anyway, he plucked up courage and sent a note down to Sheepshank through Wilberforce, of course, asking for a rise."

"A rise! Good God! Did he get it?"

"Did he get it? Of course, he didn't get it! To be with, that creeper Wilberforce must have said that he already getting enough, while—well, here's the story: Sheepshanks met old Brown on the stairs, turned to walk back to his own room, saw that wasn't possible—and then, with a sly mug of his, said: 'Oh, Brown, I believe you'd like a request for a rise on Saturday?'"

"You can imagine the effect on poor old Brown! He to splutter: 'Yes, sir, I did—you see, my wife's been very ill, the doctor's bills.....'"

"Sheepshanks didn't wait for him to say any more, but said: 'Do you ever pray, Brown?'"

"My hat!" broke in Farrar. "Did he actually have to say that? The stinking humbug!"

"Yes, he did. Brown told me the story himself and wouldn't tell a lie to save his soul."

"And what happened then?"

Pankhurst pulled again at his cigarette.

"Well, as I've just told you, Sheepshanks asked him if he ever prayed. When he got over the shock, Brown said, of course I pray."

"Go on praying, Brown," wound up the narrator, "that's the last the poor fellow ever heard of his rise!"

"And he and his damned old uncle, who looks like a faced Buddha squatting there in his room, have more than they know what to do with—what a pair! Farrar."

been known to turn up at an engagement an hour late and get a *résumé* on what had previously happened from one of the reporters on the rival paper, the *Bugle*, Farrar, even after five years' reporting experience, was still sufficiently conscientious to do his job properly, however distasteful that particular job might be. This was why he was keeping a close watch on the time now.

Presently Pankhurst turned to his companion again.

"What a woman she is!" he murmured, in sexual rhapsody.

Tom, his disgust rising within him—the vision of Pankhurst engaged on a love-joust was rather more than he could stomach—made a curt rejoinder.

"What the hell do you want to keep mucking about that lump for?" he asked; "if you want a woman, there are plenty hanging round Thomas Street."

It was an injudicious remark, no doubt, and Pankhurst showed his resentment immediately.

"A fat lot a squirt of a virgin like you knows about women," he returned; "why, you wouldn't know what to do with a girl you had one naked in front of you!"

The taunt had a certain measure of truth. Tom Farrar, known the lures of the flesh all right: at certain moments he had assumed the strident clamour of a bugle call—how else could it be with a boy of his age, healthy, good-looking, attractive with personality and the joy of life prominent features and make-up? But Tom had been saved from early disaster by two factors. In the first place his life as a reporter allowed him very little leisure to cultivate social graces, and he had become ensnared by one of the many amateur lights of London found in Burminster's suburbia; whilst secondly, although he worked late hours and the irregular times at which he worked him to running the gauntlet of the many prostitute-brothels in Burminster, in common with so many other "good" fellows in England, allowed to cram certain pavements, he had ignored these because the idea of buying so-called "companions" was nauseating. Only once had he yielded to this kind of barter. After a dinner of the local Journalists' Society, which he had drunk far too much whisky, he had stayed in the hotel, brain and flesh clamouring to be satisfied on top of a very exhausting day, the liquor had overcome his customary self-control. He was off guard.

I AM MAUD LATIMER

family doctor!—and blurting out a self-conscious confession, he had spent several days of awful anxiety. before, paying another visit, he had been assured that now there was no chance of his having “caught anything.”

But it had been a lesson—and young as he was he had resolved to profit by it. No more “love” of that description! swore it.

Here, then, was one reason why Pankhurst's haphazard ours, when he heard of them—and this sex-roysterer, like most of his kind, boasted continuously of his virility—made him feel physically sick. Another reason was his innate sense of common decency.

V

Leaving Pankhurst engaged on his favourite occupation of gazing at Ruby, Farrar left the Cave and walked quickly back to the office. Here he had a quick wash and brush-up in the very inadequate lavatory accommodation that the *Tribune* possessed. The young reporter took a pride in his personal appearance, and always liked to look well groomed. That, according to his father—Joshua Farrar, a very remarkable individual—was one of the few virtues he possessed.

Then, walking to the Circus, which was the radiating point in the centre of the city from which 'buses went in all directions, he got on one which he knew stopped at the bottom of Farringdon Road, and lighting a pipe and smoothing out the copy of the *Sun*, the one evening paper which Burminster possessed, settled himself to read.

But the headlines held no interest. The *Sun*, which was published from the *Bugle* office, was a dull-enough sheet in a scientific sense, but any newspaper at all was a newspaper to Farrar; he could have found readable matter (though he might have scoffed at the way in which it was written) and printed in the *War Cry* itself. But not to-night.

He didn't know whether it was his liver, or whether Wilberforce had goaded him more bitterly than usual; the fact remained that he was on edge.

He cursed the futility of his present “engagement” and could be interested in reading about the Gospel Group which he was down to attend? There was far too much

I AM MAUD LATIMER

"Do you know," he said, "you haven't even told me your name!"

"I am Maud Latimer," was the answer.

There was a certain air of regality about the manner in which he said the words, and Tom, with the cynicism habitual to the paper-reporter, would certainly have gibed at this, if only he had the circumstances been different. As it was, he took her hand and kissed it.

"Good night, your Majesty!" he said.

X

Half an hour later he strode into the Sub-editors' Room at the *tribune* office looking as though his head was touching the stars. Mr. Wigmore, the Editor, was there, bent of back, pallid of face, spectacles on end of nose as usual. He stared, as did everyone else, at the young reporter, who carried a challenge to the whole world in his walk.

Farrar tossed the sheets of copy into the wire basket, like a Prince of the Blood dispensing largesse.

"Some more crap for the cretins, *Mister Wilberforce*!" he announced, and departed as gaily troubadourishly as he had come.

Wigmore blinked uncertainly through his steel-framed spectacles.

"That young man Farrar," he started, "never ceases to astonish me; is he—er—do you think.....?"

"I shouldn't be surprised if he's drunk," was Hiram Wilberforce's rejoinder.

He was, as usual, only partly right. Tom Farrar was drunk it was true, but he was emotionally illuminated, not through the medium of alcohol. The sheer joy of living was thrummin' through his veins, setting his blood on fire. Fate had set him apart that night—a young god amongst prosaic men.

"No, *please!*" replied May; "but Frank can."

Eventually, it was decided that both the younger children should disappear. And it was when they had the room to themselves that Latimer *mère*, Latimer *père*, Ursula (now back from bestowing suety kisses on her beloved at the garden gate), Herbert, and the Musgraves started a further inquest.

"Something will have to be done about Maud," Ivy said, with a tightening of her lips; "don't you think so, George?"

The antique dealer pursed his button of a mouth. He would dearly have liked to say that it was no direct concern of his; but being fundamentally a coward, he compromised—as usual.

"Certainly, my dear, but at the same time this is something that your parents must take over, you know; it's entirely their concern."

"But it is the concern of all of us," retorted Ivy with asperity. "I think it's disgraceful the way Maud is behaving. Hasn't she any respect at all for her family?"

"That's just what I was saying to Eric," supported Ursula. "allowing strange men to speak to her in the street!—why, it's disgusting!"

She did not add (as she might well have done, had she retained a strict regard for the truth) that it was in exactly haphazard and unorthodox manner that she had made acquaintance of the building commodities traveller. Going to the Regent Theatre to see a performance by a touring company of a current London success, three months before, she had entered into conversation with the man—a complete stranger—sitting next to her in the pit, and had later permitted this coarse stranger to see her home. But Ursula, like many another oppressed virgin, clamouring secretly for the delights of the theatre but not seeing much chance of satisfying them, laid down the law for herself and an entirely different interpretation for people.

Then Herbert spoke—and to the surprise of the rest of the family, for between him and Maud there usually waged verbal warfare—he said strange words.

"What you're all kicking up such a row about, I know," he exclaimed impatiently. "Why shouldn't Maud allowed this bloke to speak to her, if she wanted to? She knows how to take care of herself; and, anyway, it's her own

her and the rest of the family as was possible. She could have shared a room with May, but the thought of anyone intruding on her privacy was intolerable. She had no particular criticism to make of May, who was a nice enough child, but she had to be alone. For hours after she went upstairs at night, she usually indulged in intensive thinking, and it would have been unbearable for anyone to have broken in on these thoughts. If the meagre wages that she received at the cheap dress shop in Mainwaring Street had made it economically possible, she would have left home long before. As it was, she retained as well as was possible her independence. She would have fought for this with all the ferocity of her nature.

Locking the door, her invariable custom, she lit the small fire which always spluttered, and sat down in the armchair at had one leg shorter than the other because of a missing stor. This chair was typical of the Latimer home : it was old, worn out, but no one troubled.

Coldly she analysed what had happened that night. Another girl, she knew, might have given her thoughts romantic fancy ; she might have allowed them to wing away in an orgy of senti mentality. After all, it had been a triumph : a young man of great attraction and occupying a much better social position than her own (she admitted this frankly) had paid her the greatest compliment a girl could have received.

Did she feel thrilled ? Was she excited ? Honest with herself—she had that quality, at all events—she decided that main feeling was one of personal satisfaction. The two emotions paled beside this impression. That night had given her fresh evidence that she had power—power to move a man and to sway him to do her will.

This boy, Tom Farrar, had mentally prostrated himself before her. If he had been rich, instead of working at such a commonplace and poorly-paid job as newspaper reporting, would her feelings have been then ? Because her chief wish was to escape from her present sordid and contemptible surroundings, she would probably have married him in due time, that was, if his infatuation had lasted sufficiently long. Naturally, in those circumstances, she would have given her passion at fever-heat—she did not under-estimate her case in this direction ; but as it was, he would serve no

BOOK I

CHAPTER ONE

A STRANGER PASSES

THE stoutly-built figure bending over the desk, looked up
"Tom!" he called.

From the opposite side of the crowded Reporters' Room the *Burminster Tribune* office, a slim well-dressed young man, twenty-three, wearing one of the fashionably-cut suits that marked Tom Farrar a conspicuous figure wherever he went, rose and sauntered across to the Chief Reporter's desk.

"Yes, Mr. Rideout?"

William Rideout, whose naturally kind nature thirty years of ill-paid provincial journalism had not soured, looked at the speaker with a smile.

"I'm afraid I've got nothing very exciting for you to-morrow, Tom," he remarked in a conciliatory tone. "I want you to be up to the meeting of the Gospel Group people at Fernbank Road.....you need only do a couple of sticks."

With that, as though expecting a remonstrance from the young reporter, whose ambitious nature was well known to him, he bent again over the big diary which marked the day's Events and wrote the name "Farrar" against the "engagement" question.

"All right, sir."

Masking his disappointment as well as possible, Farrar returned to his desk and resumed the transcription from the shorthand notes of the meeting of the City Council which he had left only half an hour before.

Cecil Pankhurst, two years his senior, who occupied the seat at the long row of desks, turned to him with a sardonic smile.

"Another of those chapel meetings?" he queried.

Farrar nodded.

else—not even for you! Why don't you be frank and admit it? If he had had any thought for you, would he have walked out of the room just now? No, he'd have studied your feelings; and if he thought that I had treated him disrespectfully, he would have laid it out with me privately. But no, he hasn't got the pluck to do that—he goes off the deep end and vents his spite out on the best friend he's ever had—you! I wonder you stand it; wouldn't think any other woman in the world would put up with what you have to tolerate every day of your life!"

What his mother might have replied was interrupted by the entrance of Agnes.

"What's the matter with Father again?" she asked. "I saw him walking up and down the garden as though he didn't know what to do with himself."

Mrs. Farrar sighed.

"Tom has been upsetting him," she remarked.

Agnes tossed her head.

"And I don't wonder at it," she said acridly; "as though work in this house isn't enough to put up with, apart from the squabbles going on all the time. Aren't you ashamed of your brother added, looking at her brother.

Tom bit his tongue. He would have liked to launch further into a tirade of rage, but the sight of his mother's doleful, misery-ridden face discouraged him.

"If I said anything to hurt Father's feelings, I'm sorry and can go and tell him so, if you like, Agnes."

"I'm not going out in the cold; do your own apologizing." And his sister, seating herself at the table, started her breakfast.

It was a miserable meal. After absenting herself for a minute or so, Mrs. Farrar returned to the table and gloomily poured herself out a cup of tea. She did not say anything, Tom sensed that she had run out into the garden in a futile attempt to induce her husband to return to the warmth of the living-room. The fact that he had not listened to her persuasions was typical of the man. He would much rather stay out in the garden with a hat, risking the chance of catching a cold, than submit to the abominable pride. And if the cold did materialize, it would give him a further opportunity to martyrize himself.

In the circumstances, Tom felt that every man

"What a paper!" went on Pankhurst; "but wait until we get out of here and up in Fleet Street, old boy! We'll show 'em!"

Tom, nodding, went on with his work. He was completely fed up with the dull routine of his working life, but, unlike Pankhurst, he tried to do something about it. There was scarcely a week went by when he did not address a letter to the News Editor of one of the great London newspapers; and already he had in his desk a pile of replies. These varied in phraseology, but the purport was the same. His letter had been received and contents noted. When the writer had a vacancy on his staff, he would let him know. Meanwhile, he was his faithfully, etc., etc.

Yes, and meanwhile, Tom Farrar told himself, he could eat his heart out in brooding disappointment. For a youth who had journalism in his blood, who thought of little else for at least sixteen hours out of every twenty-four, his present existence was nothing more than steadily working a treadmill. He had long since revolted against it, but what was to be done? The only other paper in the town worth considering was not much brighter than the *Tribune*—and the pay was, if anything, worse.

So he had to be content—content with reporting such routine and soul-destroying engagements as Police Courts, Inquests, Bazaars; interviewing and visiting celebrities (not many of these: Burminster did not encourage celebrities, unless they were of the extremely pious variety), and the never-ceasing religious festivals in which the *Tribune* specialized.

Writing quickly the last paragraph of the latest City Council gab-fest, and drawing the pencil-line at the bottom of the page to denote to the printer that that was the end of the matter, Tom rose, gathered up the forty-odd sheets of neatly written copy, and with a set face, walked out of the room. Crossing a long passage, he went into another room, slightly smaller in size, on the door of which was a printed white notice—

SUB-EDITORS

Here, facing the door, he saw an elderly man with the querulous features of the chronic dyspeptic. It was the Chief Sub-editor of the paper, Wilberforce by name, and his implacable enemy. Hiram Wilberforce had many prejudices, and the most virulent of these was the fixed determination not to allow a single

mother's distress. That his mother was passionately and sincerely fond of the incredible Joshua Farrar he knew—but this did not relieve his feelings to any extent. He felt it so manifestly unfair, so unjust, that a woman who spent her whole life, who devoted every waking thought to the man she had married, should be repaid in so gross and unprincipled a fashion. As everyone said who knew them both intimately, the type of woman Joshua Farrar should have married was the strong, have-no-nonsense type who, at the first sign of these temperamental spasms, would have taken him by the shoulders, shaken him soundly, and said: "Look here, once is quite enough with this sort of thing. You pull yourself together, or I shall leave you!"

If his mother had only done that in the early days, what a difference it might have made! For that his father was at heart a coward, he was certain; only a coward could persistently behave in the way he did.

III

Getting out at the Circus, Tom decided that, as he still had another hour to spare, he would devote it to exercise. He would pay a pilgrimage to the seat on which Maud Latimer and he had sat the night before!

Jumping on another 'bus, he got out on the edge of the Common and walked across in the direction of the Medway cliffs. The keen air blowing from the distant sea shook the cobwebs from his mind, sent the blood racing through his veins, and banished the storied clouds from his face. Yet every now and again he lapsed into his former mood. Why was it that one person should be allowed to permeate with his misery all those around him? Why could everyone be happy—like himself? What was the cause of this unrest and disturbance?

As he tried to solve the problem, which he realized must exercised the ingenuity of many greater minds, he saw in his mind's eye an article on the leader page of the *Banner*. It headed:

WHAT I FEEL I WANT FROM LIFE.

BY A MODERN YOUNG MAN.

Swiftly he arranged his paragraphs, starting with a opening sentence. He knew from constant reading that the

line of brightly-written matter to enter the paper over whose contents he had almost complete control.

As Tom Farrar's most earnest endeavour in life was to get brightly-written matter, written by his own pen, into the staid columns of the *Tribune*, it was inevitable, of course, that there should be conflict between the elderly Wilberforce and the young reporter. Indeed, it might not be stretching the point too far to say that the whole historic saga, depictive of the immemorial newspaper feud between the creative artist, as represented by the reporter, and the scoffing, cynical slaughterer, as represented by the sub-editor, was typified in the nightly wrangling that took place between Wilberforce and Farrar.

The latter now laid his pile of copy in the basket to the left of Wilberforce's chair.

"What muck's this?"

Wilberforce's invariable question, uttered in a whining tone, was greeted with a cold and challenging stare.

"'Muck's' right," returned the young reporter; "it's the City Council tripe." And then he added: "You won't find much to cut out there, *Mister Wilberforce*."

He invariably gave Wilberforce the "*Mister*" because he had a perfectly sound conviction that the Chief Sub-editor of the *Tribune* had no pretensions whatever to the status of a gentleman. Wilberforce was the type of man who toadied to his superiors, bullied his inferiors, and whose jowls ran wet in the anticipatory thought of getting a free drink. He was of such a type, to sum the whole matter up, that once, when word was passed round the office he was ill, one acidulated wit in the Reporters' Room looked up from his copy and said casually: "Let's hope it's nothing trivial!"

"If I have any more of your impudence, Farrar, I'll take you down to Mr. Sheepshanks," the Chief Sub-editor now threatened.

The young reporter greeted this journey to a strange country—the managerial floor—with another exasperating stare.

"But I wasn't impudent to you, *Mister Wilberforce*: you asked me a question and I gave you an answer. You ought to be grateful that I speak to you at all. But if you like, I'll make a bargain: stop talking to me, and I'll stop talking to you—God knows, I don't want ever to have anything more to do with you."

The sallow features of the Chief Sub-editor now crimsoned.

illed in the time by going to a cinema, or paying a visit to a neighbouring public billiards saloon and having a game of snooker-pool. But to-day he did a very revolutionary thing; almost before he was aware of the fact, he had got on a passing 'bus, and twenty minutes later left the vehicle almost outside the front gate of his home.

His mother, who opened the door, stared at him.

"What's the matter, Tom?" she asked.

It was symptomatic of Mrs. Farrar's outlook that she should consider any out-of-the-way occurrence to be associated in some way or another with trouble.

"Nothing, Mother," he replied; "only I had a couple of hours -- so and I thought I'd pop home to see how you were getting on."

He felt embarrassed after making this statement. But then he says did feel embarrassed when trying to express to his mother really deep affection he had for her. And Mrs. Farrar, for part, seemed uncomfortable when listening to these vocal butes; it was not that she did not appreciate the love her son ad for her; it was simply due to the fact that such words made er feel uncomfortable at the time, although later she would buy hem to her breast, and treasure the look with which they wer accompanied.

"Oh, I'm all right," she said.

It was not a very comforting or, indeed, a very adequ reply, to Tom's way of thinking; and, because he wished to how things were for himself, he walked past her and, opening first door on the left, found himself in the living-room.

Sitting crouched over the fire, his usual attitude, was Jo Farrar.

His father looked up with that kind of sick-dog expressi his dull eyes that Tom knew so well and hated so virulentl

"Well, my boy, what's brought you back home?"

Not a word expressive of pleasure at seeing him so ur tedly; no trace of affection: no hint of delighted surpris that monotonous whine, which turned the boy's stomach/ over, and made him feel that he wanted to rush straigh the house.

"Oh...I had some time to spare and I thought I'd co to see how you all were."

There was a pause. Perhaps his father, during thi was mentally weighing up what might be at the f

"When I was your age, I had sufficient manners to be respectful to my superiors," Wilberforce stated, the repellent whine in his voice returning.

Tom yawned.

"Well, if I had time, I'd be very pleased to argue the matter with you—but as I haven't, I'll leave it for another day. Good night, *Mister Wilberforce!*"

And, amidst the discreet chuckles of one of the junior sub-editors, he left the room.

II

The clock in the passage outside showed five minutes to seven. He had had no tea—the Council Meeting had begun at three and he had gone straight on without a break. The religious thing started at eight, so he had just about an hour. No, not an hour: it would take him twenty minutes at least to get to Fernbrook Road by 'bus.

As he returned to the Reporters' Room to lock his desk, he found Cecil Pankhurst waiting for him. He didn't care very much for Pankhurst—the fellow had perpetual bad breath, and the sight of his claw-like, ill-kept hands was almost as repellent; but, as he and Pankhurst represented the younger generation in an office of middle-aged and old men, the two were thrown constantly and inevitably together. And in their different ways, they shared much the same ambitions—Pankhurst professed to be as anxious to get away from the *Tribune* as he was himself. In moments of alcoholic elation, they had grown to exchange confidences about the future.

"Come and have a drink, boy," now invited Pankhurst. He had a habit of addressing even men much older than himself in this way.

At any other time, Farrar might have declined the invitation. Unlike Pankhurst, who, at twenty-five, had already developed an astonishing capacity for standing liquor (especially when someone else bought it), he rarely drank unless he felt depressed; and on normal occasions he preferred to go round to a neighbouring cheap snack-bar, named Murray's, where one could get astonishingly good coffee—poured by yourself from two urns, one containing the actual beverage and the other hot milk—at the low price of three pence. This, with a sausage roll, or ham sandwich,

Kingdom; in a more progressive town, it would have been scrapped years before; as it was, the vehicles that still ran were fit only for museum relics.

Usually Maud had to stand for the whole of the journey, the youth of Burminster being constitutionally impolite, but this morning she was more fortunate. As she pushed her way past the conductor, who was shouting his customary "Pass along in front, please," a man rose from the right-hand corner, tipped the brim of his shabby bowler-hat a little further backwards, and said gruffly: "Ere you are, miss."

"Oh, thank you," she replied, and subsided with so much grace that a bespectacled girl sitting opposite reading the *Daily Mirror*, paused first to stare blankly and then to burst into series of short, apparently witless giggles.

Maud had her own paper, the *Daily Banner*—but instead glancing at the front page, which rioted as usual with the particular horrors the Editor decided should enthral his two million readers that morning, she put a hand inside her bag and drew the letter which she knew must be from Tom Farrar.

She studied the writing on the envelope. This had character decided. It was certainly distinctive; and, although the words evidently been written at great speed (all newspaper reporters had to write quickly, she supposed), each letter was clearly formed. The writing, as a result, was as easy to read as typescript.

After she had perused the single sheet, which was headed

"Tribune Office: Midnight,"

twice, she put it back into the envelope. She smiled as she did. It was a smile both of toleration and amused complacency in fact, exactly the sort of smile that she imagined a fan star would indulge in when going through her fan-mail.

But, he was a nice boy; and she was quite looking forward to seeing him again.

usually comprised his midday meal; whilst tea (when he could find time to get it) was only varied by substituting the sausage roll for a roll and butter. The tea being undrinkable at Murray's, he always chose coffee.

"Thanks, Cecil—I will," he now said on the spur of the moment.

The two put on their hats and overcoats, watched by the older members of the staff. Manson, a middle-aged man with a pronounced paunch and a walrus moustache of such dimensions that it invariably dropped into his beer, stared after them with a sneer.

"There go the future Special Correspondents—I don't think!" he jeered.

William Rideout stopped writing in the diary.

"You needn't sneer, Manson," he replied; "both those boys are going to make good one day—and I hope I live to see it. If he only had the chance, Tom Farrar would already be a brilliant descriptive writer, whilst Pankhurst—although I don't like the lad very much personally—is already a thoroughly capable journalist."

It was characteristic of Rideout that he should be loyal to those members of his staff who had to suffer the scoffings of their elders, mainly because they had the energy and ebullience of youth.

Fully conscious that they were being criticized, the two junior reporters walked down the stone stairs (the *Burminster Tribune* didn't possess such modern conveniences as lifts) and emerged into the quietude of Thomas Street, through the Publishing Office.

"Let's go to the Cave," suggested Pankhurst.

Farrar nodded indifferently. He knew—as a great many other people in the *Tribune* office did—that Cecil Pankhurst was in the habit of spending most of his spare moments in this underground bar, gazing lasciviously at the ample proportions of Ruby, the fourteen-stone barmaid. Pankhurst in addition to his drinking propensities, had already sampled as many of the delights of the town as his salary would permit. Many of these were distinctly of the dubious variety—but, then, what could a fellow do on a provincial reporter's salary, especially when he had to support both his parents?

all.....—"You'd better invite Mr. Slaney round to supper one night, Ivy." And so I have."

What had all this to do with Tom Farrar? Maud might well have asked. But she didn't trouble: she knew, of course, that the motive behind the invitation which she had just received was devouring curiosity on the part of her sister and her husband. No other reason could have been sufficiently strong for Ivy to have sacrificed her dignity to the extent of entering the despised shop.

So she was very casual.

"When did you say.....to-night?"

"Yes.....were you meeting Mr.—whatever his name is—to-night?"

"His name is Farrar, F-A-R-R-A-R, and I *am* meeting him to-night.....He's coming round home, as a matter of fact."

Her sister's face sank.

"Oh," she ejaculated. "Then, perhaps....." Ivy bit her lip: she had hoped to be shown some eagerness, and a sense of gratitude, for the favour she had been good enough to bestow; then, Maud was always difficult.

"You can't manage it, then?" she wound up sharply.

Maud still kept her in a state of suspense.

"I don't know.....I shall have to ring up Tom—Mr. Farrar. He may hate paying social calls. I don't know enough about him to say....."

"I should have thought that you would have *liked* to be able to bring him round to my house," snapped Mrs. grave, her pride now almost in the dust.

Her sister did not give an inch.

"Don't run away with the idea, Ivy, that you will be either of us a favour by having us round," she said slowly and distinctly; "as a matter of fact, it will be Mr. Farrar who bestowing the favour. He is a very striking boy—a fascinating personality."

Mrs. Musgrave sniffed.

"I'll tell you more about that when I see him," she said, her nostrils dilating once again; "well, I can't spare time to be at the shop.....business. George has happened to me."

As the two strolled up the main street of the town, on the way to the Cave, they made a striking contrast. Tom Farrar looked the public-school product in every detail, although he had merely been a graduate of the local Grammar School. Pankhurst, on the other hand, betrayed his origin in his clothes and gait; a sycophantic type, he admired the better-educated and better-mannered Farrar, and would have tried to emulate his taste in clothes and linen if two things had permitted—the first obstacle being money, and the second courage. Farrar's taste ran to tweeds and brightly-coloured neckties: he might have been a youthful country squire in some of his garbs. The effect of him walking into the Burminster chapel and church meetings had provoked many comments, and not a few protests to his superiors; but, as he had to find an outlet for his temperament somehow, and as this was impossible in his present work, with the challenge of youth, he went to the best tailor in Burminster and continued to dress as he liked. That he always owed for the last two suits whilst ordering a new one, did not worry him. Care of any kind sat lightly on his shoulders; he was the age.

"Had another row with Wilberforce, Tom?" Pankhurst asked, as they drew near the Cave.

"Yes—the old swine! He started the usual story—'What muck's this?'—and I told him it was the City Council crap and that there wouldn't be anything for him to cut out."

Pankhurst laughed. It was more a snigger than a laugh, but as this noise passed for hilarity on all occasions with his companion, Farrar knew that the other must be amused.

"I wish I could get out of this lousy hole!" he continued passionately; "nothing can ever happen to us while we're here—how can it?"

Pankhurst pulled at the cigarette he had just lit.

"No—nothing, except waiting for dead men's shoes. And who the hell wants their shoes, anyway? Look at old Williamson—a married man with four kids, and getting six quid a week. Why, it's practically starvation—haven't you noticed how Rideout always tries to get him dinner engagements because the poor b——is always so hungry?"

Farrar nodded.

"But what's the good of writing up to London? They always send the same reply. I'll tell you what, though, Cecil, it won't

hensive grasp of current world-affairs—but they were her relatives. So—

"I must say the fellow Slaney gave me the creeps; he reminded me of a slug, and"—with passion in his voice now—"I hated the way he kept looking at you. You've never met him before, have you?"

She shook her head.

"No—never."

"Then what in the hell did he mean by it?" He was vibrant with anger.

The hand on his arm tightened its hold.

"Now don't get so excited! As though an old man like that could ever have any interest for me!.....Oh," pointing, "there's us! Let's go up on the Common."

V

It was late when he left her that night. The walk on the common had repaid him for all the previous fret and annoyance; he had been very gracious; in his over-generous, ultra-impulsive way, he could have gone on his knees to her; and when at the moment of parting outside the house, she slipped her arm round his neck, pulled his face down and kissed him with unsuspected passion, he had felt intoxicated with happiness. The girl had had that effect on him from the beginning, but this was Ecstasy.

Nor was that all—

"Good night, darling! Go straight home," she said softly.

There was a strange huskiness in her tone, which further enthralled him. Before to-night, there had always been a suggestion of stern self-discipline about her, an air of aloofness, delightful in one sense, but maddening in another. Of course, he knew what had caused it: every girl had to be on her guard, especially in the early days of acquaintance with a man in whom she was interested. That was Eve's case; every decent girl, he had told himself, must have behaved in exactly the same way, and comforted herself in precisely the same manner. But now Maud had, aside all her doubts, had cast off all her inhibitions: she was responding in kind, loving him as he loved her.

He caught her to him fiercely. Words would not

d'Asti, was entertained by the "widow lady of extraordinary beauty (none fairer) whom the Marquis Azzo loved as his own life," and in pursuance of that pleasant occupation kept the same lady in the Castel Guglielmo.

Many times had Maud read of the adroit manner in which this beautiful wanton had seduced the stranger who had found himself in such a hapless plight when the lady of the house took pity on him, but to-night the story seemed to her to have the full and proper significance that had been lacking before.

As she read the perfumed, exotic lines, with the allure of physical passion gilding every syllable, she almost cried out in hopeless longing.

"The lady meanwhile took a little rest, after which she had a roaring fire put in one of her large rooms, whither presently she came, and asked her maid how the good man did. The maid replied: 'Madame, he has put on the clothes, in which he shews to advantage, having a handsome person, and seems to be a worthy man and well-bred.' 'Go, call him in,' said the lady. 'Tell him to come hither to the fire, and he will sup; for I know that he has not supped.' Rinaldo entering the room, and seeing the lady, took her to of no small consequence. He, therefore, made her a low bow and did his utmost to thank her worthily for the service she had rendered him. His words pleased her no less than his person, which accorded with what the maid had said: she made him heartily welcome, and installed him at his ease beside the fire, and questioned him of the adventure which had brought him thither. Rinaldo detailed all the circumstances of which the lady had heard somewhat when Rinaldo's sudden appearance at the castle. She therefore gave credence to what he said, and told him what she knew of the servant, and how he might easily find him on the morrow. Then bade the maid set the table, which done, Rinaldo washed their hands and sate down together to sup. Tall and comely of form and feature, debonaire and gracious of manner, and in his lustrous pride. The lady had again and again to her no small satisfaction, and, her passion being already kindled for the Marquis, who was to come to lie with her, she had let Rinaldo take the va-

ging for the girl who had so grossly insulted him that night—could still hear her voice declaiming scornfully, "I should hate to be a dentist!"—was almost unendurable. In vain he called on his former principles once again, those golden precepts which had served him so well in the past.

But now, like traitorous demons, they turned and spat at him. "Fool!" they seemed to say. "Poor, damned, blasted fool!"

Yes, that was what he was—a damned fool. For everything that night had turned topsy-turvy; he had met a girl who had a man's manacled sense of manhood shriek in protest. Why, he was like a boy looking at a girl's legs for the first time...

And the unalterable truth was that Maud Latimer had despised him. Her contempt had been shown unmistakably; it had been almost as though he had offended every physical sense she possessed.

In this new-found honesty which revelation had brought him, Oswald Slaney was able to apply the reason for such a mortifying fact. Or, rather, several reasons. The first, of course, rested with the girl herself. In her glorious young womanhood, with her fresh, vibrant beauty, her tremendous zest for mere living, it was not natural that a man like himself should make any appeal to her. That was Reason Number One. Reason Number Two gave him even more bitter resentment. Although Mr. Musgrave had said that "there was nothing in it," this affair between Maud Latimer and that damned young reporter was evidently progressing very favourably. Even if they didn't get married—and what had a young reporter to get married on, he would like to know?—they were probably very much in love with each other; were already perhaps actual lovers. If Oswald Slaney had been wearing his dentures, he would have gnashed them at the thought.

At this point, the dentist got out of bed and looked at himself in the mirror hung over the oak dressing-table. It was not reassuring sight—especially after his recent thoughts. The only really arresting feature about him was his eyes—and these now glinted with a hot, burning fire.

He got back to bed—and further self-torture.

Reason Number Three was also disturbing. The girl had liked his profession. Once again he heard her say in cruelly scornful, "I should hate to be a dentist."

Fresh waves of baffled longing beat over grey Oswald Slaney.

of sticks. What have you got?"

It was their custom to comment on their evening engagements in this way.

"Oh, I'm going to the Argus."

The Argus had started life as a music-hall—that was many years before—had been tried out as a picture-house, but failing in this (the principal reason being that the management, with obstinate bad judgment, would insist on showing mainly British films), and had now been turned into a stamping ground for a third-rate repertory theatrical company. The Drains had never obtained much of a hold in Burminster. There had only been one decent theatre, the Regent. But the lustre which had once surrounded that house in Deepside had disappeared almost overnight when the Proprietor, the famous "Tommy" Montague, had died. The Regent under his supervision had been one of the best houses in the provinces; it had had a long and glorious history; but after Montague's death it had passed into the hands of a syndicate owning a large number of provincial theatres. The result had been more or less chaotic; from a Number One Touring Company house, it had degenerated until most of the "shows" were so bad that now scarcely anyone ever went to see them.

The Argus was a different proposition altogether. In the days of long ago, it had been a third-rate music-hall, although celebrated artistes like Eugene Stratton, Phil Ray, Gus Elen, Marie Lloyd, and others of that category had been head-liners. But now, as already said, it was the home of a distinctly third-rate repertory company.

"What are they doing?" asked Farrar, who liked nothing better than an evening at the theatre when occasion offered itself. Avid for the lure of the footlights, he didn't mind very much what type of show it was, but preferred a good melodrama.

"Oh, some lousy tripe by Bernard Shaw," was his companion's indifferent retort. How could a fellow think of plays when Ruby's gorgeous breasts so inflamed the mind?

— After that, conversation lapsed for a while. Pankhurst, for his part, was still watching, as well as was possible in that dense crowd, the majestic Ruby moving about her business—how he wished he could be sure of having her that same night whilst Farrar, lost in his thoughts, drank his beer and from time to time at his watch. Unlike

him out into the fresh air and try to ram some sense into muddled brain. Although there had been many occasions in the past when he had been consumed by jealousy, he was yet, after his own fashion, very fond of the youngster whom he so fervently, if secretly, admired. What he had told Tom about the future had not been unduly exaggerated; he honestly believed that Farrar was going to make good as a writer in some spectacular fashion. And it would be a pity if he blotted his copy-book just at the time when his prospects seemed so promising. He couldn't go to the *Banner* without a reference from the *Tribune*.

But, arguè as he might, nothing would deter Farrar from his resolve. And so, twenty minutes later, after running the gauntlet of a number of policemen, who did the Nelson trick of possessing a blind eye once they had ascertained who these two roysters were, the pair of reporters arrived at the *Tribune* office.

III

The publisher, through whose domain they passed—a short, squat figure who spent his life brooding on the hideousness of Life as viewed from his Thomas-street doorway—eyed them speculatively as they lurched in. A natural pessimist, he forecas disaster.

"You two're drunk," he declared; "better go 'ome."

"It's a' right, Lennie," replied the leader of the party. To Farrar put his hands on the grimy publisher's counter and sway like a tight-rope walker starting his stunt. "We know what we about—don't we, Cecil?"

Pankhurst, having the gravity of a bewigged judge, nodded.

"Mind your own bloody business, Lennie," he retorted tremendous deliberation; "peddle your papers."

The publisher, shaking his enormous head (which seemed too heavy a burden for his frail body), contented himself with a further grunt. Never having possessed any youth himself he disliked all the members of the younger generation with whom he came into contact.

"All right, but I've *told* you!" he gloomed, before aside to resume research work on the football pool he was to complete.

Undaunted, the pair of reporters made the ascent of the stairs. It was a somewhat laborious process, first because the stairs

Wigmore listened without comment until the reporter had come to an end.

"Then it amounts to this, young man," he summed up: "you risked your life in order to get a good story—is that it?"

Tom shook his head.

"I don't know about that, sir; it seemed to me that the real story was in the rescue party—so I went. Of course, old Wade, the miners' agent, told me that if anything happened he couldn't be held responsible. Good sport, old Wade."

"He would appear to be—from your point of view, at least," was the comment. "Well, Farrar, you are continually giving me surprises." The speaker paused to smile fleetingly, before continuing. "In these special circumstances, I will agree to go through your copy myself. You have an hour and a half before we go to press with the final edition. How much do you think it will make?"

"I don't know—I must get at it straight away.....Excuse me."

He wrote like a man inspired; the pencilled words flew over smooth copy-paper. As he completed each sheet, he flung it on the floor by the side of his chair. Scriven, his good friend of a few hours earlier, came in every twenty minutes or so, gathered the pages, which he took straight into the Editor's room, whilst Wilberforce, his own superior, frowned and stamped in silence beneath his breath.

Ten minutes after he had written the last sentence, Tom told that the Editor would like to see him.

"I'm breaking a fixed rule of the office, Farrar, in your name to this stuff," Wigmore told him: "but you have written a very remarkable story to-night.....and..... I'm very proud of you. But," lowering his voice, "the office is no place for you, my boy; a man who can do the stuff you have to-night, is meant for higher things..... Go home and get to bed. You have done a splendid night's work."

Outside, Scriven, who had listened-in to every word, told the young reporter noiselessly on the back.

"Grand! Wilberforce is spitting blood——"

Inspiring as had been old Wigmore's praise, Tom concentrated on what he considered the essential factor.

thirty or so, in passing, gave him a smile. And after the smile had come her trade greeting: "Ello, darling!"

Throwing his customary caution to the wind, he walked up to her.

"Ello, darling," she cooed again. "What about coming back with me; I'll give you a good time!"

He thought of what awaited him at his excessively puritanical home—his father sitting alone, all ready and anxious to give him the usual admonition: "If you have a conscience, my boy, I should think it would prick you now!" and put off this moment by taking hold of the woman's arm.

"All right, my dear," he said slurringly; "where do you live?"

Even the mention of the St. Christopher district—the well-known habitat of the street woman class in Burminster—did not deter him. He was too far gone in drink.

IV

His initiation into the extremely doubtful joys of sexual intercourse with a woman of the town took place half an hour later. Inflamed by liquor, his desire was purely lustful; and when satiation came, disgust rose predominantly. He looked at the woman as though she were a leper. How could he have been such a fool? Good God, suppose.....?

His final sickening came when, in paying the woman, he heard a knocking on the door.

"Who's that?" he asked in alarm.

This creature might have a bully! Blackmail! Not that he was in a position to pay any hush-money, of course: the last-pound he had in the world was now being thrust into the prostitute's hand. But all the same...

"Oh, it's only me 'usband. 'Ere, go out this way," the woman smirked.

Once he was in the clean night air he cursed himself afresh. He had heard of the awful consequences of venereal disease, and every nerve in his body started to twitch at the thought. He wanted to be sick, and was—violently.

When he eventually got home—at two o'clock in the morning—he listened to his father's admonition, and considered that on this occasion his parent was justified in his diatribe.

Once had been enough. After going to a doctor—not the

throughout Fleet Street) could be depended upon to lick the new recruit into shape—always providing the neophyte had the requisite ability in him. He had past experience to go upon in that respect, for he had achieved many startling successes—"A.E." was the type who forgot his failures.

Now, as he read quickly through the proofs of the two-column "splash," which was to be the secondary feature on the *Banner's* front page (Special Late Edition), due to go to press in twenty minutes' time, the familiar state of nervous excitement which invariably preceded the conviction that he had made a new "discovery" swept through him once again.

He pressed the bell on his desk.

"Tell Mr. Whittier to come in," he told his secretary.

When the lantern-jawed Night News-editor sauntered into the room five minutes later, with his customary nonchalant manner

said of Whittier that he feared nothing that walked on earth then he had no need to do so with his consummate ability), his superior in position if not in intellectual question at him.

"You read this stuff from Burminster?" demanded he, holding up the proof he had been perusing. "My reply was short."

"—good stuff."

"I ought to have his own opinion confirmed," the Editor boomed in the baying voice he kept for such occasions. "Good stuff! Better than that, old boy—it's *Banner's* colliery disaster story I've read for years! Damn it, smell the sweat oozing out of these poor devils, see their eyes, feel the dread in their souls.....Look here," came to the climax of his decision, "this fellow Farrar, or whatever his name is, has got to be with us. We can do with him here. Some of our present reporters are getting slack; they are so bloody slack that it's time they were pitched on their ears. What do you think?"

Whittier, who in the course of his ten years' service had seen so many bright young geniuses come and go, stayed safe. In his heart he had a twofold feeling about the fellow: he admired the astonishing way in which "A.E." played up a good story, but at the same time he experienced a very deep detestation for a man who, even in this

been known to turn up at an engagement an hour late and get a *résumé* on what had previously happened from one of the reporters on the rival paper, the *Bugle*, Farrar, even after five years' reporting experience, was still sufficiently conscientious to do his job properly, however distasteful that particular job might be. This was why he was keeping a close watch on the time now.

Presently Pankhurst turned to his companion again.

"What a woman she is!" he murmured, in sexual rhapsody.

Tom, his disgust rising within him—the vision of Pankhurst gaged on a love-joust was rather more than he could stomach made a curt rejoinder.

"What the hell do you want to keep mucking about that eat lump for?" he asked; "if you want a woman, there are plenty hanging round Thomas Street."

It was an injudicious remark, no doubt, and Pankhurst showed his resentment immediately.

"A fat lot a squirt of a virgin like you knows about women," he returned; "why, you wouldn't know what to do with a girl if you had one naked in front of you!"

The taunt had a certain measure of truth. Tom Farrar had known the lures of the flesh all right: at certain moments these had assumed the strident clamour of a bugle call—how else could he be with a boy of his age, healthy, good-looking, attractive, with personality and the joy of life prominent features of his make-up? But Tom had been saved from early disaster in this respect by two factors. In the first place his life as a reporter allowed him very little leisure to cultivate social graces, and thus he became ensnared by one of the many amateur lights o' love to be found in Burminster's suburbia; whilst secondly, although the late hours and the irregular times at which he worked disposed him to running the gauntlet of the many prostitutes which Burminster, in common with so many other "good" towns of England, allowed to cram certain pavements, he had always ignored these because the idea of buying so-called "love" was nauseating. Only once had he yielded to this kind of unpleasant quarter. After a dinner of the local Journalists' Society, at which he had drunk far too much whisky, he had stumbled out of the hotel, brain and flesh clamouring to be satisfied. Coming on top of a very exhausting day, the liquor had got under his customary self-control. He was off guard. A woman of

SNATCHING MEN FROM DREADFUL DEATH

REPORTER'S VIVID DESCRIPTION OF RESCUE WORK IN APPALLING COLLIERY DISASTER

50 KILLED IN BURMINSTER TRAGEDY

It was not these headlines, arresting as they were, which riveted his attention, however; it was what immediately followed them.

For there, in vivid black type, were the words:

BY

TOM FARRAR

"DAILY BANNER" SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

His astonishment of the day before, when the same newspaper had accepted an article from him to be printed (presumably) on its leader-page, was nothing compared to the surprise which now made his heart thud in his breast.

His instinct had told him in the early hours of that morning that Chance had led him (even if by a very circuitous route) to one of the biggest stories that any reporter could experience in lifetime. That was why he had implored old Ben Wade, the miners' agent, to allow him to accompany the rescue party in the pit. But, all the same, he had not imagined that the *Banner* would either use so much of his stuff or give it so much prominence. Why, he discovered after reading feverishly the few lines, they had scarcely altered his "lead." And, still going on, he found that not only had all his best phrases (written at such a breakneck speed) been used, but that the *Sub-editor* instead of "killing" them, had in many cases rounded them to perfection.

The joy of it! Full of the true creator's elation, he lay on the pillows and re-read the story time and again. For he had suffered at the hands of Wilberforce was more than compensated for in that moment. He now knew himself a real journalist, a born descriptive writer—this stuff the *Banner* had proved as much.

The second on the same list to read the *Daily*

thirty or so, in passing, gave him a smile. And after the smile had come her trade greeting: "Ello, darling!"

Throwing his customary caution to the wind, he walked up to her.

"Ello, darling," she cooed again. "What about coming back with me; I'll give you a good time!"

He thought of what awaited him at his excessively puritanical home—his father sitting alone, all ready and anxious to give him the usual admonition: "If you have a conscience, my boy, I should think it would prick you now!" and put off this moment by taking hold of the woman's arm.

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IV

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"Oh, it's only me 'usband. 'Ere, go out this way," the woman smirked.

Once he was in the clean night air he cursed himself afresh. He had heard of the awful consequences of venereal disease, and every nerve in his body started to twitch at the thought. He wanted to be sick, and was—violently.

When he eventually got home—at two o'clock in the morning—he listened to his father's admonition, and considered that on this occasion his parent was justified in his diatribe.

Once had been enough. After going to a doctor—~~not~~

But only—and I would ask you to let this sink well in, Mr. Farrar—only, I repeat, after they have faithfully discharged their obligations to their own employers. Is that quite clear?"

"Yes," was the response; "but if you will take the trouble to enquire of Mr. Rideout, the Chief Reporter, I have no doubt that he will tell you that I did 'faithfully discharge my obligations to my employers' last night. If you have any shred of doubt about the matter I would advise you to have a talk with Mr. Wigmore, the Editor. Mr. Wigmore should know because it was he himself who went through my copy last night."

"Yes.....yes."

Adrian Sheepshanks turned down the blinds on his bilious-looking eyes, and was evidently contemplating a flanking attack. This came suddenly.

"And there is another matter, Mr. Farrar, about which I am compelled to speak to you: Mr. Wilberforce has complained that you were in a state of acute intoxication last night in the office, and that, moreover, you were very abusive to him. Mr. Wilberforce, I scarcely need to tell you, possesses one of the brightest brains in the office—he is so valuable a servant, indeed, that I will allow no one—no one, you understand—to pay him the slightest disrespect.....Now.....is it true you were intoxicated last night?"

"I was as drunk as an owl," was the disconcerting reply.

The whole body of Adrian Sheepshanks—such as it was—shivered. If he had been struck a blow in the most vital spot of his organism, he could not have displayed more discomfiture.

"You actually declare that you were—drunk, as you call it—when you know how strict are the views of my uncle on the subject of intoxication amongst the staff?"

"You asked for the truth; I'm telling you the truth."

Sheepshanks twitched.

"You admit no shame—no remorse?"

"None whatever. I had a good sick before rushing of Three Mile pit last night, and I felt perfectly well afterwards."

Sheepshanks now blinked.

"It is an astonishing confession—one which shocks me terribly!" he declared; "and what my uncle will say to me I do not know."

right: the *Tribune* was no longer an office in which he could work; he must pass on.

Back in the Reporters' Room, he found himself the central figure once again. Although no word was spoken, he knew that everyone present (and by this time the whole of the reporting staff had gathered) was speculating as to what had happened on the floor below. Cecil Pankhurst started to move towards him; but before he could speak, William Rideout had forestalled him.

"Well, Tom?" the Chief Reporter asked in a kindly tone; "what happened?"

"I gave Sheepshanks notice, and I'm leaving to-day."

Tom would not have been human if he had not said the words with a certain defiance.

It was like a bombshell exploding; everybody began to talk at once. Manson, with a characteristic sneer, muttered something about "Living to regret it.....", but as this was so entirely typical of the groucher, no one paid any attention. What mattered most was Rideout's comment:

"Well, I can't say I blame you, Tom—your place is not here any longer. But all the same I'm very sorry it's happened."

The words reminded the young reporter of all that he owed his Chief. He went over to the desk at which Rideout was sitting.

"I'm sorry too, sir—if it's only because it means leaving the room. I can't tell you how grateful I am for all that you have done for me."

And then, because he was still very young, and because the emotional stress of the last forty-eight hours had been very heavy, he turned away to conceal the tears that had started to flow from his eyes.

Rideout coughed to hide his own feelings.

"It's time you fellows started to get some work done, said, so gruffly that everyone knew the annoyance was his. "I've got to go to the Official Receiver's Office myself—rest of you had better get about your jobs. I'll be seeing you again, Tom—you'll be wishing us all good-bye, I suppose."

"Yes, of course, Mr. Rideout."

religious muck. But, thank God, he only had to do a couple of "sticks" (i. e., forty lines of printed matter), and after that he would get on another 'bus and go up to the Club. Here he was certain of getting either a game of snooker-pool or bridge. He played both games well, but was generally unlucky, which was one of the principal reasons why he was always hard up. The few pounds a week he received as salary from the *Tribune* didn't go very far; after paying his mother thirty shillings for his board and lodging, he was usually "subbing" from the cashier by Wednesday evening. This meant that there were usually two days in every week in which he had to husband tobacco and other minor necessities.

Perhaps, he reflected, his present sense of dissatisfaction with the world was due mainly to Pankhurst. What a slug the fellow was! If they hadn't had their common ambition as a ground on which they could meet, and if he wasn't thrown so constantly in the company of the other, he would leave Pankhurst severely alone. He was no prig, no puritan—but Pankhurst was a fellow who nauseated him. Why, he'd thank nothing of going out on Thomas Street after finishing at the office and picking up any old whore that offered herself! Why he hadn't "copped out," he couldn't conceive. He supposed some were born lucky in that way, as in any other. But, in any case, Pankhurst was simply asking for trouble sooner or later. His behaviour was well known in the *Tribune* office, and the wonder was that he hadn't been pulled up long before. Of course, he had sufficient sense not to get tight, and, to give the devil his due, he always did his work well. There was never any complaint on that score. Even Wilberforce, who hated young reporters on the staff as a point of principle (that old fellow ever been young himself?), had been known to speak admiringly of Pankhurst. But that perhaps might be due to the fact that they both sprang from very common origins.

He dismissed Pankhurst. He had been around the office one day and he wanted to fill his mind with some thoughts. When he returned to the office the next morning, he found the evening's engagement—he felt back once more.

He was conferred with Pankhurst, who had been suggested his mind had been too busy to think of anything in it in respect—but what was the good of that? The morning

doubt. Now, Tom, you will find London full of chances—good chances, perhaps; but also certainly bad chances. You will be running the danger of losing your head—oh, I know what I'm talking about—I've walked that street myself, as the poet puts it. You'll be living at a high pressure; life on the *Daily Banner* is going to be a very hectic affair, unless I'm mistaken, and I don't think I am; and, living at that high pressure, you'll be bound to let off your guard occasionally."

Burnside took the pipe from his mouth, placed it on a tray by the side of his chair, and leaned forward. His voice was now wholly serious.

"I'm your friend, Tom—your pal—and therefore I'm going to claim the right to speak to you as though you were my younger brother. You're a lad of great promise; don't for God's sake throw it all away in an off-moment. Now tell me—do you want the truth, mind—do women attract you?"

"They do—at least, some might perhaps, but I've been right up to now," was the reply.

"Kept yourself clean, eh?"

"Yes."

"And you're going on keeping yourself clean?"

"I hope so."

Burnside rose and began to walk up and down the room. Suddenly he stopped, paused by Tom's chair and put his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"You'll find it hard, Tom. It's hard for any lad of your age with your temperament it will be especially difficult. I think I don't know what I'm talking about; sex has its own special demon, something that I have had to fight all my life—something I'm fighting even now. Yes.....I tell you what he went on, "because you're my friend, because I can give you what help and guidance I can. This will perhaps, but if I'd yielded to one-thousandth part of the temptations I have had in that direction, I should have been a different man long ago. Ruined, not only in soul, but in health."

"You're just reaching the age when women begin to tempt you—you see, I'm not mincing my words. They will use every devil's device to get you. I tell you, Burnside went on, "why it is that so many men, who are concerned, are forced to fight such an unfair battle."

was known as the "City of Churches," and the *Tribune* specialized in reporting all possible kinds of religious subjects, more especially those promoted by the Free Churches.

Well, after five years, without being a cynic, he wasn't impressed! He had seen so many of these parson-fellows in undress—he knew them to be what they were: no better and no worse than the average man, who didn't make a parade of any religious belief whatever. In his capacity as a newspaper reporter, he had seen through the chinks in their supposed armour: he knew them, in many instances, to be almost insanely jealous of each other—why, they were almost as bad as doctors in this respect; he knew, too, that the majority of those he had met were perfervid self-seekers. When they made an especially spirited address, or eloquent sermon, he knew that they were thinking not so much of the effect their words would have on the congregation, but of the praise and admiration they would receive later in the vestry. They were, in fact, generally speaking, a pretty lousy lot.

He made one exception—that of William J. Burnside, the man at the Northside Baptist Chapel. Once a collier, Burnside had worked his way up by sheer force of character and brilliancy of intellect. Now, whenever he was announced to speak, the doors had to be closed half an hour before the service started. It was as though the two local football professional teams were meeting in a cup-tie.....!

He had enjoyed for some time a warm, personal friendship with Burnside; he had been a frequent visitor to his house on the northern heights overlooking the town, and had been encouraged to talk frankly about his views on life—and especially about his ambitions.

Burnside had given him some very sound advice.

"You've got talent, Tom," he had once said; "and, having talent, you mustn't waste too much time in this dull burg.....oh, I'm not saying anything against Burminster, mind you!" qualifying the statement with an attractive smile; "Burminster people have been very kind to me—and it's a poor sort of man who fouls his own nest. But, on the other hand, I have met a good many provincial newspaper-men in my time, and—remember, once again, I'm speaking generally—this kind of newspaper work leads practically nowhere."

Tom had challenged the statement.

honest as he looked. But she shook her head, and requested the caller to take a seat. Tom would have sat on the sofa, but recalling what had happened on that piece of furniture only the night before, he backed away and selected a chair.

One fact was already very plain: Mr. Latimer was obviously uncomfortable in the presence of his wife—for what reason Tom could not decide—and he took the first opportunity of getting away.

"Well," he announced, "I'll go up and have a word with Maud." He sidled away quickly after making the statement.

Tom had the impression that he was being left alone with a gorgon; this woman, the first sight of whom had made him blanch, had a stultifying effect on him; without much more effort on her part, he would be quickly turned into stone. This first impression of Mrs. Latimer had been very strange; he could scarcely believe that she was human. The strange effect of seeing what might very well have been a man's face—and a very plain man's face at that—placed on a woman's body, was staggering to him. His professional interest was aroused; he felt he ought to write a story about this phenomenon. How could such an odd creature as this have produced such a beautiful girl as Maud? It seemed a biological incomprehensibility.

Mrs. Latimer did not sit down herself, but continued to stare regarding him with the same fixed, unblinking stare.

"I've been waiting for the opportunity to have a talk with you, Mr. Farrar," she said at length.

This opening gambit was not encouraging. Mrs. Latimer spoke like a woman who has already made up her mind that he was an undesirable person.

"That's very kind of you, Mrs. Latimer," he felt forced to reply.

"When Maud told me how you two met, I must say I didn't like the sound of it a bit. Picking up nice girls in the street!—I hope that's not your usual habit, Mr. Farrar; at it's never been done in my family before."

"If there had been anyone to introduce us, Mrs. Latimer would have been different." Why did this dreadful woman continue to look at him in such a way? "As it is, I don't see much harm has been done."

"One can become an editor," he said.

The minister had smiled.

"Yes, there's always a chance of being an editor—but how big is the chance? That's the point!"

Tom, having done some reflecting, decided that the other might be right. There were three newspapers published in the town, employing perhaps seventy journalists altogether. And there were exactly three editors out of the whole bunch.....

"I don't say that you should leave here immediately—personally, I should be very sorry to know that you were going—but I do say that you must keep an eye on your future, my boy," the minister had continued.

"I've done all I can to get up to Fleet Street—but it doesn't seem any earthly use. They've replied to my letters, it's true—at least, some of them have—but the others merely say there's no vacancy and—well, I'm pretty well fed up with the whole business."

The older man had nodded.

"Now listen to me, Tom," he replied; "a man who is a Cabinet Minister to-day, but who used to be a newspaper reporter just like yourself, once said to me: 'Journalism is a good step-sister, but a damned bad father.' In other words, journalism—London journalism, that is—can be a stepping-off place to practically anything—but if you stay in it, you'll never be much more than you are to-day.....Oh, of course, there are exceptions—War Correspondents, Special Correspondents, Feature-writers and all the rest of it—but I'm speaking, remember, of newspaper work as a whole."

"Then what do you advise me to do?"

"First of all keep an eye on the future. I know you don't have much time to yourself—but study other subjects. Have you ever had the ambition to write a novel, for instance?"

Tom shook his head.

"Too many words," he said, with a rueful smile; "besides, after slaving away at a novel for perhaps a year, what does a fellow get? Twenty-five pounds.....if he's lucky. If he's not, it's just so much wasted effort."

Burnside nodded again.

"I see your point. Well, the same thing might apply to every other ambition—take the case of the old newspaperman who is

She thought she would try to destroy a little of the self-esteem.

"Well, if you *must* know, Mr. Slaney has taken a great interest in Maud; he is treating her for nothing." Primed with this information by her eldest daughter, Mrs. Latimer felt a very human pleasure in putting this very rude young man in his place. If he thought that Maud was to be had for the asking, she would teach him a lesson—and she hoped that it would do him good. What right had an insolent young puppy like him to take so much on himself?

"It's the first I've heard of it," Tom replied. And then kept t. Why hadn't Maud told him she was going to Slaney's night? It didn't seem to him to be quite honest of her. But, he supposed, there was a reasonable explanation, and that would give it to him when opportunity offered itself. In the meanwhile, he wished she would come down from her rock. Why was she keeping him waiting like this? There didn't seem to be any reasonable excuse—not unless she were ill. But her father had assured him that she was quite well, and he blamed it on to her temper. But why was she annoyed?

Meanwhile, the gorgon showed how unsettled she still was by her mind by letting loose a further devastating remark.

"And there's another thing; since Maud has been going with you, she's been keeping very late hours. I want to tell Mr. Farrar, that I don't like it. It doesn't show a nice girl. What time did you leave her last night, for instance?"

Tom became uneasy. The workings of his own conscience were sufficiently disturbing, without this woman—who, at least, was Maud's mother—putting such a pertinent enquiry.

"I'm afraid it *was* rather late, Mrs. Latimer; you see, I and I celebrated my going to London and—"

He couldn't continue; playing the cheat was not in his nature. Why the hell didn't Maud come and relieve him of this part?

"Her father has always been inclined to give Maud freedom. It's not that I don't trust her myself—as I do, Mr. Farrar, she's such a pure girl. And I hope that she will always remain so. That's the result of a good mother, although I do say it myself."

Tom did a little moral preening himself. It seemed to him that these distressing circumstances.

now a Cabinet Minister, for instance. Suppose he had had the same outlook as you? Suppose he had said to himself when he was a young man: 'What's the use of striving? I've got about as much chance of getting into the House of Commons as I have of flying.' See my point?"

"Yes, but....."

The minister banged his fist on the table. They were sitting in his comfortable, but barely furnished, study at the time.

"For Heaven's sake, Tom, don't let there be any 'buts' in your case! I don't want to talk about myself—but you know what my life's been: working in the mines until I was seventeen and then resolving to try to better myself; studying at odd hours and oftentimes when I was so weary with sleep that I could scarcely keep my eyes open; then practically working my way through college by doing odd jobs of any menial description—and finally starting as a minister of the Gospel at the magnificent wage of £80 a year!...And I was married on that, mind you! Burnside went on with much of the fire that had made his preaching so popular: "Married, yes, and had a kid!"

VI

Something of this last talk he had had with Burnside returned to Tom as he stepped off the 'bus at the end of Fernbrook Road.

And at that moment something happened to change the whole course of his life.

A girl, tall and slim, with what seemed to him to be a wonderfully graceful carriage, turned to look at him as he passed. She was fair, with creamy skin and a touch of colour in her cheeks.

He was never able to decide in the days ahead what it was that caused him to stare. It must have been the unexpected appearance of this girl, whose beauty was so arresting, that made him forget his manners.

But he *did* stare—and, as though acknowledging this tribute the girl smiled.

Instantly Tom felt himself galvanized. The world had suddenly rocked beneath his feet. It was as though life for the first time in his existence had taken on a true, significant and proper meaning.

He stood riveted to the spot, unable to move, still staring a

sixteen hours a day, six days a week, remember."

Tom murmured something which he feared was entirely unintelligible. He hoped it was; there seemed a grave danger attached to saying anything sensible to this very odd person.

"I'm glad you realize that," continued Bickersdyke quickly, switching into yet another mood. "But time is getting on; I have several other people to see. But before I take you along to Mr. Loder, who is expecting us.....you're ready to start work at once, I suppose?" flashing the question obliquely at the recruit as though a sudden suspicion had arisen in his mind.

"Yes, I'm prepared to start at once.....of course," was the answer.

"That's good!" The speaker rubbed his hands. "But before we go in to Loder, I want to give you my definition of NEWS. News, as you know, is what makes a modern newspaper, *Fairfax*. It is especially valuable to a paper like the *Banner*, which is really a day-by-day printed record of the nation's heart." He paused, and Tom, getting the impression that he was expected to warm to the phrase and demonstrate some appreciation of it, nodded.

Bickersdyke pulled out a drawer on the right of his mammoth desk and took from it a sheet of typewritten matter.

"Here is the best description of NEWS, as seen through the eyes of a News Editor, that, perhaps, has ever been written," he stated; "read it yourself."

Tom took the sheet. From the first line the stuff was familiar; he hadn't he already tentatively himself word perfect with the magic phrases?

"News is as hard to hold as quicksilver, and it fades more rapidly than any morning glory. But, for all that, it is the by-goniest stick we have to hold up against the growth and decay of human lives and human ideas. It is a sounding-board, empty by well-meaning newspaper-men, on whom the love-calls and prayers, the whines of meanness and the trumpets of glory receive their test. It is cheap and worthless stuff and it is sinews of history."

"That is magnificent," he said, and would have given sheet back if Bickersdyke had not gestured for him to keep

the back of the girl as she walked away from him.

She had smiled...! That meant...? Without stopping to think, he turned on his heel and walked rapidly after her. He had to speak to this girl; he simply had to speak to her! And more: he had to get to know her! She was necessary to him! Other girls had smiled at him, but that had meant nothing: they had just been so many silly fools, trying to draw attention to themselves by making the first overtures.

But *this* girl was different—entirely different...

Breathing quickly, he drew alongside her.

He felt his heart racing. Speaking to strange girls in the streets had not hitherto formed part of his normal behaviour—but this was exceptional.

She might either have heard his footsteps, or known intuitively that he was following her. In any case, she stopped.

She was even more beautiful at close quarters, Tom decided: poorly dressed as she was, she appeared in that moment the most enchanting creature he had ever seen.

Neither spoke, but the girl's eyes held an expression of slightly mocking, but not deterring invitation.

Tom, ingenuous in that vivid moment, spoke what was in his heart.

"I felt I had to talk to you," he said simply. ...

She smiled at the words.

"Of course, you know you ought not to?"

"I know.....But please forgive me...I don't usually.....at least, I..."

"Where were you going?" she broke in. Her voice was calm and assured.

This was a conversational lead, and he seized it.

"I'm a reporter..." he started.

"A reporter?"

"Yes. On the *Tribune*. I was going to a religious meeting."

Her lips curved in a fresh smile.

"A religious meeting? You don't look like a boy who goes to religious meetings."

"It's part of my job," he told her; "we—reporters, that is—have to go to a lot of meetings, you know; of course, it's all so much rot."

"Just business—is that it?"

evening before, he had been told that there was nothing for him after all and that he had better see about fixing up some lodgings. "You will find it too expensive to stay in an hotel; better try rooms or one of the hostels," continued Loder, with an unexpected display of interest in his welfare.

After talking to another reporter, named Jamieson, he had gone off to an address in Manchester Street, at the back of Selfridge's, and had there engaged a bed-sitting-room at the unheard-of figure of thirty-five shillings a week. He could breakfast (at a price) on the premises, the landlady informed him, but he would have to see to the rest of his meals himself. Anxious to secure a base, he agreed to the terms, extortionate as he considered them to be.

He was now lying in the not-too-comfortable bed when a knock came on his door.

"Your morning tea, sir," announced the maid.

"Bring it in, please," he said quickly, hoping that his instructions that a copy of the *Daily Banner* should be brought to him directly it was delivered had not been forgotten.

He neglected his tea, in the eager search through the pages of the paper for the story he had not written.

On an inside news page he found the following:

GENERAL KEEPS STIFF UPPER LIP

"I STILL LOVE LARRY!" SAYS DAUGHTER

Betty Fitzroy-Waters, only daughter of the famous General and a well-known figure in West End Society, does not see a hope of reconciliation with her father. As a result of romantic elopement with Larry Dixon, the famous B.E. crooner, last week, she incurred the General's wrath—and it does not seem to be any chance of a rapprochement.

Interviewed yesterday, she said that "She loved Larry much indeed, but still hoped that her father would give her forgiveness. Oh, do try to get Daddy to understand!" she on to plead.

When a Daily Banner reporter called on the General yesterday after he was told that Betty's father had nothing to do with the matter, he kept a stiff upper lip.

'Yes. I say...' And then he felt he could not go on.

'What are you going to say?'

'I was going to ask you something. But I don't suppose I use.'

But, inside, he believed that this girl was as good a sport as he had imagined. And how marvellous she was! Far beyond, of course; she had only allowed him to speak to her for a cause—well, he didn't know the reason, unless she had been excited at the time, and felt in need of some mild excitement.

'What were you going to say?' she asked for the second time. Her voice was still steady, well controlled.

'I wonder if you would let me see you later? I must go now, but I shall be free in half an hour. Would you? *Please!*'

'Do you *want* to see me again?'

The ordinary girl, he told himself, would have used coquetry. But this one was too fine a character to employ any such ploys.

'Yes...I want to see you terribly.'

Sex-enchantment, such as he had never known before, had turned through him. He felt dizzy; his heart was beating more quickly than ever. It was delirious enough even to be near her, but to be able to touch her—to hold her hand...!

'I might.....but why should I?'

Again there was no hint of coquetry. Instead, the girl appeared to be putting the other side of the problem to him.

'Oh, *please!*.....be a sport!'

That seemed to appeal to her, for she smiled again.

'You're terribly impulsive, aren't you?'

Although there could not be much difference in their motives, yet there was a hint, or so it seemed to him, almost of motiveless in her attitude.

'Yes.....I suppose I am,' he replied, 'but, you see, time is short—and if I hadn't spoken to you; if I hadn't asked you to see me again, I might'—how prostrating was the thought that he never have seen you again!'

She stood watching him for a few moments, as though something was stirring up her mind. Evidently, the impression she had was far from feeble.

'Yes, I'll see you.....I was going home, as a matter of fact, to live up there,' pointing to the darkness of an adjacent:

voice, the most appalling make-up he had ever seen and perfectly revolting finger-nails. She eyed him in a way which made him recall Loder's vivid warning.

"How nice to see a fresh, beautiful English boy again," she said dramatically; "tell me, what is your name?"

"Tom Farrar."

"Tom Farrar! A lovely name for such a lovely boy! You're very young, aren't you?"

"I'm twenty-three."

The woman exuded a combination of body-odour and stifling perfume which was sickening.

"Twenty-three! Oh, to be twenty-three again!" She clasped the hands with the revolting finger-nails, and then held out her arms with such—or so it seemed to him—obvious intention of dragging him into them that he recoiled.

"You mustn't be shy, little boy!" she croaked; "why, I have held some of the greatest men in history within these arms! Do down and smoke a cigarette; I feel I can talk to you."

Tom, perching himself gingerly on the edge of the chair that was nearest the door, prepared to listen. Sanity, with a despairing cry, he felt, was toppling over the abyss, but he had met so many extraordinary people during the past month that he was willing to take this fresh freak in his stride—so long as she did not attempt a physical assault upon him.

But he had to revise that opinion; this woman was the best exhibit yet.

Mrs. Egbert Thoms talked.....

She told him first of all about some of the sex-experiences she had had throughout her life. That even the most debased living creature could talk in this way to a perfect stranger was unbelievable; at least, it would have been unbelievable if he had not heard the filth with his own ears.

After an hour or so of this besmirching smut, he interrupted.

"The News Editor particularly asked me for the 'Message' which you told him you had for the nation," he remarked.

"Ah!" The appalling nails, bitten to the quick, were on high again. "My message!—yes; it is this: take it down in your notebook very, very carefully, Mr. Farrar: For those who wish to love truly and deeply, go to the Arctic wastes....."

"Not alone?" he felt compelled to ask.

"But I'll come out again. What time?"

He looked at his watch.

"It's now three minutes to eight," he told her; "with any luck, I ought to be able to slip away by half-past. Could you be here, then?"

She nodded.

"Yes.....quite easily."

"I promise not to keep you waiting a *second* longer than I can help. But please give me a couple of minutes."

She nodded again, and a fresh smile spread over her face. He noticed then how white were her teeth, and how well kept. By her clothes he imagined that she must be some kind of shop-girl, or, at least, the daughter of people in comparatively poor circumstances. But what did her clothes matter? It was the girl herself who had changed the whole world for him.

"Thanks most awfully—you're marvellous!" he said. "Half-past eight, then."

"Half-past eight—I'll be here."

With that, she turned, and walked, with that curiously graceful sinuosity, away.

VII

The meeting had already started when he stumbled into the church. Farrar did not know that the recent encounter had turned him into a strikingly handsome youth. His face was flushed, and his eyes bright. Many a woman, old and young, coming there to listen to the Word of God, felt their thoughts wrenched violently away from any thought of the Hereafter. What they concentrated on momentarily was the Present—the Present with this radiant-looking boy. Here was Life, not Death.....

Tom paid them no attention. They were the typical stiff-looking religious lot, in his opinion, and the thing was merely a dreary prelude to the prospective happiness, the very thought of which threatened to suffocate him.

Sitting down at the end of a long seat, and pulling out a note-book and pencil with which to make the necessary shorthand notes, he waited impatiently for the opportunity to create forty lines of printable copy. Time drew—there were only ten minutes left—he intended minutes past eight whatever happened—

ANIMALS IN CAGES

I

THE close-smelling, dingy, dark-panelled court-room which was always reserved at Burminster Assizes for important criminal trials, was packed to the last inch of space as Tom Farrar took his seat at the end of one of the Press-benches.

He had had over eight months' experience as a London newspaper reporter, and during that time his mental sensibility had hardened to an extraordinary extent: he had seen so much of Life's grimy side that he would have said nothing could ever surprise or shock him. One cannot handle pitch without getting filthy, and going behind the scenes as he had been exploring the heart of the matter of politicians, and remarking on the language of some of the great ones of the earth, generalised and softened his human nature. He knew this to be true: one cannot be shocked at the innate worthlessness of the majority of mankind without suffering from serious soul-sickness oneself.

But, as he looked around that stifling Court—where the air would be so close as the day proceeded, he dared not conjecture he felt relieved. That he, of all people, should have been ordered to sit day after day, hearing the evidence—damning evidence, no doubt—which would send the only a few months before he had considered the worst well as the best of her kind, to the hangman's block there ever been such a turn of the Wheel?

When he had recovered from what from that first shocking shock of surprise after Winter, the Night News

the rostrum on which was placed a huge copy of the Bible, began to talk in terms which Farrar from his experience knew were intelligible to the religious that constituted the main the *Tribune's* public.

pencil raced over the paper. Three sheets of his notes, would be sufficient.

When he reached the end of the third page he rose precipitously, took his hat—he had not troubled to take off his overcoat—and walked quickly towards the door.

He turned, the minister, reading from the Book, intoned :

"And lo, the wicked departeth !"

Any other time, he would have appreciated the aptness of the coincidence; but now, indifferent to the repressed snickers all about him, he reached the door, nodded to the startled official who stared at him blankly, and passed out into the street.

He was free for the adventure which stretched ahead ! There was no thought of lust, nor, indeed, of sex in any form, as he hurried round the corner, where, heart thumping at the sight, he saw a girl awaiting him. No, this was so far removed from the usual "pick-up" that any connection between the two did not occur to him. He only knew that life had blossomed in some marvellous way during the past half-hour ; that existence appeared at last, to have some meaning for him outside of his work. Now, his interest in living had been concentrated on one thing—getting on with his job and endeavouring to secure a post in another newspaper office than the dreary *Tribune* build-

ing ; now a great change had happened ; almost a miracle, in that he knew he didn't want to leave Burminster ; indeed, the thought of leaving Burminster was incredible ; for it would mean that he would not see this girl again.

At this time, he had reached her side—eager, palpitant,

"You're here!"

His excitement he reached out and caught hold of both her hands.

She smiled at his eagerness.

"Of course—I always keep my promises," she replied.

I AM MAUD LATIMER

On the fourth of March last, Mr. Oswald Slaney, a dentist, practising his profession at 115 Repton Road, in this city of Burminster, a man aged fifty-one years, was found in a dying condition by the female prisoner, Maud Slaney, who was his wife. The main symptoms which the dying man—for Oswald Slaney did not live long after he was found by his wife—presented were those of apisthotonos: "the patient was discovered lying extended on the floor of the living-room at his house with the head and heels only touching the carpet; his eyeballs were staring and his chest was fixed. Medical evidence will be called to this effect. The time at which Mrs. Slaney entered the room to find her husband in a very serious condition was 9.25 p.m.; the actual time of his death was twenty minutes later, namely 9.45 p.m.

"A neighbouring doctor was quickly called—to be precise, the female prisoner telephoned for him—but Mr. Slaney was beyond medical aid. He was so ill indeed that Doctor Trevor, who will give evidence, could do little or nothing to relieve his agony. Doctor Trevor will tell you that it was impossible to move the patient to either a nursing-home or a hospital.

"The circumstances surrounding Mr. Slaney's death were so suspicious—Doctor Trevor, as he will inform you, immediately thought of poison—that he, and very rightly so, refused to give a certificate. I may explain at this point that Doctor Trevor was the regular medical attendant of Mr. Slaney and was, therefore, in a reasonable position to be aware of the normal state of this unfortunate man's health.

"Naturally, he enquired of Mrs. Slaney if she were aware of anything that her husband might have taken either in the form of food or drink which could account for his condition. Mrs. Slaney replied—I will give you her exact words—'No—but he was always talking about committing suicide.' This, as I hope to prove during the course of the trial, was a very significant statement for the accused to make.

"Before I go any further, I think it necessary that I should say something about Maud Slaney, the woman prisoner. She is twenty-four years old, having been born on the thirty-first March, 1914. Before her marriage she was a member of a somewhat large family, called Latimer, and before marrying Oswald Slaney on the seventeenth of October last year, was employed in a dress-shop in Mainwaring-street, Burminster, as a salesw

A STRANGER PASSES

It was then that he knew he had not been deceived : this was one in a million.

"What shall we do?" he asked. "Don't let's go to Pictures, or anything like that to-night..."

"Well, what would you like to do?"

"Let's go for a walk...I want to talk—I feel I want to talk to you for hours and hours and hours!"

"I've never met anyone quite like you," she told him. The words were honey to his soul.

"I'm glad to hear you say that—because, you see, I've never met anyone like you."

Then the sight of a 'bus made him take hold of her arm.

"Let's go up to the Common," he stated.

She hesitated for just a moment. And in that moment he was afraid she might have misunderstood. The Common was a great open space, extending for several hundreds of acres, lay at the back of the most exclusive residential quarter of the city. After dark it was given over to lovers. Seats were placed in many appropriate spots....

"Please don't think I'm like that," he said, the words coming so quickly upon the previous ones that they might almost have been part of the same sentence.

The girl reassured him.

"If I *had* thought so, I shouldn't have allowed you to speak to me," was the thoroughly satisfactory answer.

VIII

It was on a seat overlooking the famous Medway Valley that he kissed her for the first time. It was getting late now, near ten o'clock, and they had been talking : he had given her almost a complete *résumé* of his life to date—telling her of his previous work at the office, his ambitions, of his previous experience with girls—"but I've never troubled about anyone before; that's true,"—and of his hopes for the future.

"But how can you be so sure about me?" she had said. "Why, we haven't known each other for more than an hour."

He had waved the objection aside.

"I only know this," he answered. "Directly I saw you everything seemed to change...no, I'm serious! Please don't laugh...I can't explain it—I only wish I could. It is something

s time now for me to say something about the man who is argued jointly with her. Basil Leadbeater is twenty-nine years of age and is a fully qualified dental surgeon. For the past eight months—ever since, in fact, the practice in Repton Road changed hands—Leadbeater had been employed by Mr. Slaney as his assistant. He proved himself, as well as can be gathered, most capable, and Slaney, at any rate, appears to have thought well of him, so far as his work was concerned.

"But, however admirably the male prisoner conducted himself whilst working at his profession, he had—and this will be proved up to the hilt—a most unenviable reputation in another direction. Not to mince words, Basil Leadbeater was a chaser-after-women, a philanderer, a fornicator. I make no apology for using that last term, 'm'lud' (looking at the Judge). "Because it is the one word in the English language which is most applicable to the male prisoner. He was, I repeat, an habitual fornicator.

"All might have been well if he had kept his immoral practices aside the house of his employer—but at very costly and estimate, if a violently unromantic figure, who died in agony a most terrible death." The speaker paused before adding impressively: "Let us not forget that fact. Oswald Slaney died in agony a most horrible death.

"But—and the evidence I hope to call will be most positive on the point—Leadbeater almost immediately after the marriage of Oswald Slaney began to make overtures to this young wife. She' (she once more paused to add emphasis to his words) "responded. And in a matter of not going to her marriage-bed she and the male prisoner were lovers. In this letter (Exhibit II), dated the eighteenth of November last—exactly a month after the marriage, it will be noted—Leadbeater writes.

"My Darling—

You were marvellous last night! I've never known a girl like you! If old Slaney had come in when we were giving the romp together, I suppose we'd have spat blood. I know I should have if I had been in his place!

But bloody old fools who are no good should not mar beautiful girls who are crying out for love, should they?

Well, if it's love you want—and you do, don't you, darlin'—I can meet all present demands, I think.

like hearing a beautiful piece of music for the first time—are you fond of music, by the way? You've got such lovely hands..."

"I don't get much time...but I play the piano a little."

"I don't even do that. Usually, I hate music. It's because I don't understand it, I expect," he added truthfully. "But sometimes when I'm at the theatre, or a place like that, the orchestra will strike up something that seems to hit me right there," and he lightly touched his breast over his heart. "It makes me go very quiet..."

She laughed a little with him now.

"But you weren't very quiet when you first met me—I never heard anyone so talkative!"

"I know...but that was because, you see, I was afraid you might go—vanish—and that I should never see you again."

"Would you have been sorry if I *had* vanished?"

"I don't know what I should have done," he told her sincerely; "to have seen you—and not to have known you...But now tell me something about yourself."

"I'm afraid I'm nothing like so interesting as you," she said modestly. "My people are poor; I'm one of a large family; I work in a cheap dress shop, and—oh, well, there's really nothing I can tell you about myself at all."

Looking at her so closely, he was able to see a hard expression change the whole structure of her face; it was as though she had suddenly put on a mask—a repellent mask. The sight was so shocking to him that he put his arms round her.

"I want to change all that. I'm horribly poor—most reporters are, especially in an office like the *Tribune*—but, still, we'll have good times, won't we?"

"You're an awfully nice boy," she replied.

"Then you'll let me see you again—often?"

"If you want to."

"That's marvellous! But, of course, you must have heaps of men friends—have you?" a sudden, awful spasm of jealousy stabbing him.

"I know a good many men—but there are not many I care very much about; they're just acquaintances, such as any other girl has. You see"—watching his face closely—"I have two brothers, and they bring their friends home."

The answer was as completely satisfactory as he could have

expected; but in that moment Tom Farrar was to learn one of the inexorable lessons of life: that one cannot have a single minute of joy without being forced to pay for it. He was to know in the next few weeks both the ecstasies of heaven and the grinding agonies of hell; but now, coming back to reality, he concentrated on the one thing that mattered most.

"I must see you home," he said; "your people may be wondering where you are."

She rose with a sigh. The sound struck at his heart.

"Are you unhappy at home?" he asked, moved to a compassion that shook him.

"I hate it," she answered, "but I expect I am to blame..... perhaps I expect too much from life."

They had started to walk back across the Common to the 'bus-stop. The turf was springy beneath their feet; the stars shone benignly, and the night air had an invigorating tang. How dared God allow such a girl to be unhappy? Tom asked himself. And how was it possible that such a girl, blessed with such beauty of face and grace of body, was unable to get all she wanted out of existence? It seemed incomprehensible to him.

"I can help you there, if you will let me," he replied, after long silence, during which they walked as close to each other as was possible. "I'm able to get passes for shows—such as the are in Burminster—concerts, circuses...you'd like that?"

"Yes...but why should you take the trouble?"

He stopped, held her by both hands, and looked into her face.

"I don't know if this is what they call 'being in love,'" he replied, "but I know that to-night is different from any other night I've ever known."

"You're very sweet," she said, and, leaning forward, kissed him spontaneously on the lips. There was the heat of slumbering passion in the caress, and it set Tom's brain whirling.

IX

They clung to each other at the garden gate, which led up to the shabby-looking house twenty yards or so away.

"You're my girl?" he pleaded.

"Yes...I'm your girl," she whispered back.

He laughed with that intoxicating sense of happiness which had come so mysteriously to envelop him.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LATIMERS, EN FAMILLE

I

MAUD LATIMER walked slowly up the weed-bestrewn path that led to the front door. Her eyes might have been stars, they held such a frosty light : and the young man who had just paid his reverence would have been surprised if he could have seen the smile that curved her lips.

She pressed the door-latch back, and stepped into the narrow passage that ran from one end of the house to the other : 216 Ashburton Gardens was one of a row of dwellings built in the early 1820's and conformed to the architecture of that time.

From below she heard a babble of voices, and the smile changed into an expression of disgust. That awful family of hers !

Still, she was hungry, and, although her second keenest desire was to go straight upstairs to bed, she had to have food.

The big, sub-basement room that served as a general living apartment for the Latimer family was crowded. Crowded with humans : crowded with savours of supper, the debris of which was still on the table ; crowded with the fumes of cheap cigarettes and cheaper pipe tobacco.

There were nine people there, and in the following order : her mother ; her father ; her elder brother, Herbert ; her younger brother, Frank ; Ursula, her eldest sister (complete, as usual, with *fiancé*, Eric Whetstone) ; her second sister, Ivy (complete with husband, George Musgrave), and her youngest sister, May. Even to Maud, who knew them all too intimately, they seemed once again an astonishing lot.

It was her mother who gave her greeting. Mrs. Latimer had had a hard life, and much of the adversity she had suffered was depicted in her face. This held the perpetual expression of an over-worked horse : Eric Whetstone, in his earliest days of prospective *fiancé* had asked his "intended," upon being shown a group of the family, "who the sailor was."

Ursula had drawn herself up indignantly.

"Sailor ?" she had retorted. "That's my mother."

Wisely she had kept the *gaffe* to herself ; but if she had been just, she would have been forced to admit that her *fiancé's* inquiry had had some justification. Mrs. Latimer liked to dress herself in dark blue jumpers ; these, in combination with her tough, relentless features—more like those of a man than a woman—certainly provoked surprise. Especially at a first meeting.

"Wherever have you been, Maud ? Not trapesing about the streets, I hope ?"

Maud, standing with one hand on the dirty table-cloth, gave a very broadside of a reply.

"If you must know, I've been on the Common," she answered ; and then, before a rejoinder of any kind whatever could be made, she added : "I met a very nice boy to-night, and we went on the Common for a walk. Any objections ?"

So dominant was the speaker's personality that all criticism was momentarily hushed. That it would break out in a torrent very soon, Maud knew. So she got her further words in while she could.

"Have you eaten everything there is for supper—as usual ? It looks like it."

Cool, detached, remarkably impersonal, utterly and completely remote from them all, she waited.

It was Herbert, the supposed "wit" of the family, that replied.

"You can have what we've had, Duchess," he said ; "bread and cheese and cucumber—but I shouldn't touch the cucumber if I were you ; it may give you—well, hiccoughs !"

The speaker looked round, evidently expecting applause. Herbert Latimer was a loutish mistake of twenty-two. He belonged to the type of sub-human that went in 1934 tearing through the countryside on a cheap motor-cycle, the exhaust of which gave forth a deafening series of explosions ; who disdained, no matter how cold the weather, any form of head-gear, compromising by imitating the current undergraduate fashion by twining a woollen scarf big enough to choke a horse round its neck ; who smoothed its hair straight back from its forehead by means of a cheap pomade ; who sported a full crop of pimples at any season of the year ; and who had loud, but utterly worthless, opinions on practically every subject under the sun. Maud hated him with all the strength of her virile character.

Disdaining any answer, she pulled a chair up to the table, drew a mouldy piece of cheese and the tail end of a cucumber towards her, took a liberal slice of Empire butter, cut herself two pieces of bread, and settled to her supper. Meanwhile, she was conscious that she was the cynosure of every eye in the room.

It was her father who championed her.

"Leave your sister alone, Herbert," he said sternly; and then to his favourite daughter: "My dear, you must be cold. I will make you a cup of cocoa."

"Thank you, Father."

Once more the tone was cold and impersonal.

Edwin Latimer got up gracefully from his chair—it was for her father that Maud inherited not only her good looks, but her striking carriage—and walked out into the adjacent kitchen. He was quite a good cook, and often took over the whole of the family culinary operations. He was allowed to do so because he had been an abject failure in everything else in life, apart from his somewhat prolific parenthood.

Edwin Latimer belonged to the very numerous present-day class who feel themselves born to spend money without possessing the compensating quality of being able to earn it. He had tried many things in the course of his life, and all of them had been mistakes. Starting out as a clerk in a big firm of tobacco manufacturers in the adjacent city of Melchester, he had been early promoted, by reason of his good looks, carefully-kept clothes and the gift of the gab, to the Travellers' Department. But it was not long before his superiors noticed that an inherent weakness in his moral make-up was going to prove a handicap. Edwin Latimer could sell cigarettes and smoking tobacco as well—and, indeed, better—than the majority of his colleagues, but he had an unfortunate *penchant* for the twin evils of philandering and gambling. Only awaiting reliable confirmation of the news that had so shocked their very puritanical natures, the partners of Messrs. George & James Coltin summoned Latimer to their Presence. This, typified in the very ample person of the Managing Director of the firm, resulted in the summary dismissal of the young traveller, who was sent packing with three months' money in lieu of notice.

It is said of some merchants of industry that, from a certain date, "they never looked back"; but from

Latimer never looked forward. It's true he had his whole life—or the greater part of it—in front of him, but the trouble was he didn't know what to do with it.

Of course, the news of his dismissal did not help; the entire Tobacco Industry—incidentally, one of the most rigidly disciplined in British commerce—was closed to him after the episode already narrated; and, although Edwin Latimer tried his hand at many other things, the plough stubbornly refused to function.

Three years after he had shaken the tobacco-y dust of Messrs. Coltin's premises from off his feet, he had met Agatha Smurthwaite. Agatha herself was, if anything, even more unattractive than her singularly unattractive name; she was short, squat, had a face which an uncharitable critic had once described as "a wrongly-shaped bottom," possessed a quick temper, a poor taste in dress (what could anyone do with a figure like hers, anyway?)—but, overriding all these arguments in her disfavour, was the happy circumstance that she possessed a little money: an income, in short, of £ 150 a year, free of tax.

Edwin Latimer—tall, distinguished-looking in a third-rate fashion, dark hair (parted in the middle), looking, in fact, a mixture of a buccaneering Free Church minister worshipped by his female congregation, and an old-fashioned type of melodramatic actor—resolved to find harbour with the unprepossessing Agatha. She was certainly an odd-looking creature, but she did have £ 3 a week certain. £ 3 for the rest of her life. It wasn't much; but it was something.

At the time he started to pay suit to this heiress, Latimer was eking out a precarious livelihood by travelling for a door-to-door Instalment System Book Company. It was the hardest possible kind of life, but it was the best thing that offered itself at that time.

Gifted with a specious tongue, he improved on the acquaintance made as a canvasser with Agatha to get invited to dinner one night. Unfortunately for the latter, she didn't possess a father or mother; she lived with an aged aunt, who occupied the few remaining years she had on this globe by an absorbing study of the cheap cinema papers. Frustrated sexually all her life, Miss Enid Darblay endeavoured in her declining years to get some compensation by feasting on the faces and bodies of the male film stars.

This was a very fortunate circumstance for Edwin Latimer. Miss Darblay, espying a close resemblance to Justin Forman, her leading "favourite" at the time, took a warm fancy to Latimer, and when the latter stated his fervent devotion to her niece, she did not hesitate even momentarily in the matter of giving her consent. It would have been all the same had she acted otherwise, of course.

Thus, Latimer secured a wife and a sure income of £ 3 a week until the end of his—or rather her—time.

II

The marriage had achieved just about that same amount of infelicitude as might have been expected; Agatha early discovered the true character of the man she had married, but being of a resolute disposition (hence her granite-featured face), resolved to make the best of a bad bargain. She suffered many disappointments—but, however much she criticized Edwin Latimer as a bread-winner and husband, she was forced to admit his remarkable prowess as a lover. In fact, Edwin Latimer may be said to have come into his own once he got into bed...Agatha, acutely conscious of her bowed legs, flat chest and other physical feminine disadvantages, got her revenge by making incessant demands upon her mate. The fact that these demands resulted in a superfluity of children (especially when the inefficiency of her husband as a money-maker was considered), did not worry her unduly. In her own peculiar way, Agatha Latimer was a philosopher: if she couldn't get something out of existence in one direction, she was determined to have it in another.

It meant making continual sacrifices; all through her married life, she had been on short commons. Children had been born and brought up somehow—always sketchily (three had died); but a close observer might have seen an expression of triumph spreading itself over her exceedingly homely features on occasions. This was when she sat surveying the still handsome face of her husband as he went over the weekly household books. Edwin Latimer was not at his best when looking at bills.

For the past ten years the Latimers had been heavily in debt: their name was a byword amongst the local tradesmen; sometimes they were without enough coal to warm the house in winter, and

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I AM MAUD LATIMER

From Herbert: "I'll bet he'd run a mile if he did!"
From Ursula: "How ever did you come to meet him, Maud? Did you allow him to speak to you in the street?"
From Eric Whetstone: "It's no business of mine, of course, but I think you ought to be more careful in allowing strange men to 'pick you up,' Maud."

From May: "Oh, do tell me about him when we get up to bed, Maud! Promise!"
From George Musgrave (very flutily): "I think newspaper men, as a class, are dissolute."

From Mrs. Latimer: "You're being quite brazen about it, Maud!"

Maud herself went calmly on, sipping her cocoa. It was no new experience to her to set the whole family by the ears; in fact, when life was more than especially dull—when, for instance, things went wrong at the shop, and when taking a walk through Tilson Street, the main shopping centre of Burminster, she saw things displayed in the windows that she longed for but could not buy—she was in the habit of deliberately provoking them so that they all tried to talk at once. This provided cynical amusement. Now, with a Mona Lisa smile on her lips, she turned and faced her critics.

"As a matter of fact, he *did* speak to me in the street."

"WHAT!" ejaculated her mother.

Her daughter nodded.

"Yes, Tom Farrar—that's his name—walked after me to night, said that he was compelled to speak to me, and then pleaded for the chance to see me again. He had to go to some religious meeting or other in Fernbrook Road first."

"And *did* you see him again?" This from Ivy.
"Haven't I already said so? We went on the Common and talked."

May, the younger sister, leaned forward excitedly.
"Did he...did he kiss you, Maud?" she asked, whilst a batch of fresh comment provoked by the inquiry broke from the members of the audience.

Maud Latimer smiled again her mysterious smile.
"Three times," she replied.

Herbert gave a rude guffaw. He thought it was time he sustained his reputation as the family jester.

"What happened? Did he die of the shock?"

"If you carried as much in your head as you do in your feet, Herbert, you'd be a much cleverer person!" was the devastating reply.

He tried to save a hopeless situation.

"O.K., Cleopatra," he said; "keep your pants on!"

At that, Ursula, who had strong religious leanings, and who was horrified that her *fiancé* should have his mind so contaminated, rose like a hustled virgin.

"I can't stay here and listen to such talk. Come, Eric!"

The builders' merchant's representative, who had found the atmosphere oppressive for the last hour, rose obediently to his feet. He gave Maud an intent look.

"Well, all I hope is that you haven't made too big a fool of yourself, Maud—that's all," he said darkly.

With the departure of Whetstone, the Musgraves announced their own intention to leave. But not before the antique dealer, conventionally garbed, as usual, in striped trousers and black coat ("I always consider mine as a profession and not a mere business"), had himself given his sister-in-law a few verbal pearls of price.

"Look here, Maud, I'm older than you, and you know I always wish you well," he started in his fluty voice. With that, taking the ivory cigarette-holder out of his button of a mouth, he concentrated on further speech. "As a class, newspaper-reporters are dissipated, careless of their appearance, and generally disreputable," he said, drawing a deep breath, and looking as though he was quoting something from a book—which, indeed, was the case.

"How in the hell do you know? You never stir out of your stinking shop!" Maud drawled in a tone that was an insult in itself; "and mind your own damned business, anyway. Just because you married my sister, that's no reason why you should come here night after night airing your views, and making a fool of yourself. Good night, all," she concluded, pushing back her chair and walking out of the room.

This exit caused Ivy to sit down again.

"We can't go just yet, George," she said determinedly; "here's a crisis—and I want to talk it over with Father and Mother. As for you," looking at Frank and May, "you had better go up to bed."

makes me sick the way you lot carry on!"

With that he directed a particularly belligerent look, first at George Musgrave, whom he had always regarded as a sissy, and then at his two sisters.

"Herbert!" expostulated Mrs. Musgrave.

"Oh, I'm going to bed!" was her brother's scornful comment. "Good night, Ma," bending down and kissing his mother perfunctorily on the forehead. To his father he gave merely a brief nod: Herbert, for some years now, had had very little use for his very inefficient male parent; he summed up Edwin Latimer concisely as "a wash-out." Possessing most of the attributes of his generation, Herbert nevertheless had his good qualities. One of these was the love he bore for his mother. He had realized ever since childhood that she had had a raw deal from the moment she married his father, and he bitterly resented the fact. If it could have been contrived, he would have ordered Edwin Latimer out of the house, and never, of his own will, have seen his sire again.

With Herbert gone, Mrs. Latimer spoke for the first time.

"Maud has always been a strange girl," she stated; "sometimes, I don't really know what possesses her."

"I'll tell you what possesses her, Mother," sharply put in Ursula; "she's got a thoroughly bad nature—that's what it is!"

"She's certainly different from all the rest of us," supported Mrs. Musgrave.

Mr. Latimer moved elegantly in his uncomfortable chair.

"Don't forget she's your sister, Ivy," he mildly countered.

"I'm forgetting nothing, Father," was the swift retort; "if you're honest, you will agree with what I say: Maud has always been different from everyone else in the family."

Her father made no reply. If his thoughts could have been televised, they would have terrified the company. For the truth was that for everyone in that room he had an unuttered but complete contempt. Although a failure himself, he was blessed—or rather cursed—with an insight into other people's natures that was as comprehensive, as impersonal, as cold-blooded and as pitiless as any surgeon's attitude in examining a tumour. He saw them all in a blinding, pitiless light; he knew them all for exactly what they were: Ivy, a self-satisfied, minor suburban snob, perfectly content with herself now that she had achieved her desire

night he had met the well-dressed woman coming up the Ridgway Road. She was a lady : her fur coat was really expensive, not dyed rabbit-skin, but he was able to judge with his experienced eye that she was "game"—and so it proved.

Within ten minutes of raising his hat, she was not merely in his arms, but they were locked in physical ecstasy. The intoxicating memory came back to mock him, although nearly ten years had now passed since that never-to-be-forgotten night.

When it was over, the woman had tried to explain.

"I'm nursing a sick husband," she said, without any attempt at evasion : "he has been ill for over eight years—and sometimes I feel it is something more than I can bear. To-night I felt restless...I had to get out.....to try to forget...Of course, I shall never see you again. Good-bye!"

And, before he could stop her, she had adjusted her stockings, smoothed down her dress, rearranged her hat, and with a coolness that was simply staggering, had walked quickly away in the darkness. He knew instinctively that it would not be the slightest use for him to follow. Why, she might turn on him like a tigress and threaten to give him in charge for trying to assault her...! He knew enough about women to realize that.

He wondered if that was what had happened to Maud that night? As a father, it was his duty, of course, to show indignation at the mere suggestion that Maud had done anything wrong, more especially as everyone else in the family knew that she was his favourite child, but whatever his other weaknesses might be, he was not a whining hypocrite. Maud was twenty-three, and if she was still a virgin (he wouldn't be prepared to wager much on the point), then, all things considered, she must have gone through hell in order to have kept straight. For that she had a passionate nature he was convinced.

"I'm tired—and it's time we were all in bed," he said, suddenly determined to put an end to the senseless cackle.

"You never will face facts, Father!" retorted Ivy Musgrave, impetuously.

III

Maud's bedroom was at the very top of the house. Her action in choosing this attic—it was little more—was symbolic of her character : she wished to put as great a distance between

1

1

own accord, she must make it somehow. At present it seemed an impossible task, but who knew what the future might not hold? The important thing was to be ready to seize the opportunity when it came. What was that line of poetry? She couldn't remember—reading had never been much in her line—but she was sure there was something or other referring to “stepping-stone.”

IV

As she rose to start undressing, she acknowledged the truth about that night: she had not really been stirred by the embraces on the Common, although she had pretended to be—in a perfectly well-bred way, of course: girls always had to pretend to be well bred if they wished to achieve anything. Her heart had not been profoundly stirred, but her vanity had been agreeably flattered.

Slipping out of her skirt, she stood before the spotty long mirror that was fixed to the right of the asthmatic gas-fire.

Then she heard a knock on the door, followed by a voice.

“Oh, Maud, *do* let me in—I so want to talk to you!”

“Certainly not, May,” she replied instantly; “it’s much too late. You ought to have been in bed long ago.”

The former entreaty turned into a whimper.

“Oh, Maud, you *are* horrid! You *know* how I like to talk to you!”

She remained adamant.

“Yes, but it can’t be done to-night. You run off to bed now, and we’ll have a nice long talk to-morrow night,” adding the proviso just in time, “perhaps.”

“*Promise?*” came the eager voice from the other side of the door.

You heard what I said.”

“*Faithful?*”

She was beginning to lose patience.

“Will you *please* go downstairs to your own room, May?”

“Oh, all right—but you promised faithful, mind.”

Then, sounding as though they went with a sort of dragging reluctance, she heard her sister’s footsteps descending the narrow stairs.

Turning to the mirror again, Maud divested herself of the rest of her clothes. This did not take long. First a slip, then a

girdle—a mere fragment of satin, serving only as a means of keeping her suspenders in position. After that a pink silk *brassière*, and, finally, a pair of knickers so filmy they could almost have been squeezed into the palm of one hand. Stripped to her stockings—she never took off her stockings when looking at herself in the mirror—Maud stared critically at the reflection she saw.

...Yes, she certainly was attractive. Apart altogether from the striking beauty of her face (the lines of her mouth and chin made up for her prominent cheekbones), her body was wonderful. She recalled a cynical character declaring in some recent novel that "the greatest failure of women as a sex was that not one in ten thousand was worthy of the lingerie." She had been at George Musgrave's house at the time (she often went round to Repton Road, when she longed for a decent meal: that was one thing George did insist on: good food), and her sister had asked the cause of her merriment.

With the sole intension of aggravating Ivy, she had read the passage out.

"What poisonous rubbish!" her sister had declared: "a perfectly beastly thing to say--and how untrue!"

"Is it? I don't think so," she had retorted; "can there be anything more ridiculous than the average woman buying modern underclothes? *Crêpe de chine* over veiny and hairy legs! It's appallingly incongruous in my opinion. This man," tapping the novel, "is perfectly right. There's not one woman in ten thousand whose body is worthy of decent lingerie."

Ivy, who had been knitting a sampler, put down her work at this thrust.

"I suppose you don't include yourself, by any chance!" she had riposted.

"Certainly not. I have a beautiful body, and any painter or photographer would rave about my legs—if only he got the chance to see them."

"Well, I never!" exclaimed her sister. "Such disgusting stuff—and such an outlook! I wonder you aren't ashamed of yourself."

"I'm not ashamed because I'm only speaking the truth. Shall we ask George's opinion? I wouldn't mind."

Scarlet to the roots of her hair, Mrs. Musgrave stood up.

"If I ever hear you even mention sex to my husband,"

never let you enter this house again!" she cried, after struggling for breath. "Really, Maud, I'm horrified to think that you can be a sister of mine!"

The scene recalled itself to her now as she continued to stand before the mirror. What a fool Ivy was, with her puritanical airs, and her equally absurd pretence at dignity! That was what came of being imperfectly mated, she supposed: the squeaky-voiced George Musgrave wouldn't win many medals, she was prepared to swear, as a lover: all his vigour went into his shop, selling fake Chippendale chairs and bogus Hepplewhite sideboards to trusting simpletons. When he got into bed he probably went straight off to sleep...

But, then, he had his excuses: Ivy was scarcely the type to arouse clamouring amorous desires in any man: like Ursula, she was angular where she ought to have been round, and flat where she should have curved: she had practically no breasts and her hands were huge, with stumpy finger-nails. Scarcely a hour. Even her father, who was usually careful what he said to Ivy, because perhaps of the fact he was so dependent on her husband's cheques, had once given her a straight piece of his mind. The discussion that night had turned on the "disgusting condition," as Ivy called it, of Thomas Street, the recognized parading-ground of the Burminster prostitutes.

"I call it a scandal," her sister had said, her whole body quivering with indignation; "even though George was with me, these abandoned creatures dared to speak to him! Why they aren't all swept off the streets, I can't understand!"

To the general surprise, Edwin Latimer had taken up the cudgels on behalf of the criticized class.

"You seem to forget, Ivy," he said, "that these women consider they have as much right to earn a living as any other people. And whether we like it or not, the fact must be admitted that they serve a very useful purpose."

"FATHER!" cried the daughter whose feelings he had so outraged; "how can you say such a thing? Don't these women spread dreadful disease? I refuse to listen to the talk!"

She rose to leave, snapping her fingers at her husband as though he were a dog.

George Musgrave had got up obediently.

"Really," he squeaked, "I think Ivy is quite right. If the

police only did their duty, this evil would be stamped out."

His father-in-law had smiled.

"Not in your lifetime, George, nor in the lifetime of your children—if you ever have any, that is. Prostitution in one form or another has existed all through the ages—and it will go on existing; make no mistake about that." Then, with Ivy standing by the door, stamping her number 7's in shoes, he added devastatingly: "I don't think you would be much of a success at it ~~for~~ yourself, Ivy, my dear."

There had been a dreadful "scene," of course. Ivy had gone straight into hysterics, declaring she had been so grossly insulted that she would never speak to her father again, and calling upon her husband—he and Latimer were much about the same age—to avenge the contumely that had been paid her. But with Musgrave hesitating, and her father quickly professing his regret ("I'm afraid I didn't realize what I was saying, Ivy; please overlook it"), the storm blew over. Later it was agreed amongst the rest of the family that "Father must have had too much to drink before he came home that night."

She herself had admired her father for what he had said: Ivy would have made a very poor purveyor of professional love. So perhaps it was just as well that a man of George Musgrave's type had married her.

It interested Maud now, as she continued to look into the mirror, to conjecture what sort of a show she herself would make. She had the body. Her skin was ivory-white and had a sheen on it; her breasts, with the nipples pointing upwards, were large—but not too large—and firm; her thighs were attractively rounded and her legs slim and long. If she had been a man, she felt sure that what she saw in the mirror would have driven her almost frantic with desire. She would have thought the rest of the world well lost to have spent a night in bed with such a girl: young, obviously healthy, beautiful, fascinatingly shaped.....

But she wasn't a man; she was a woman. And that meant an entirely different outlook.

Sex was merely a passing preoccupation to the average man, but it was a very important business to a woman. She already knew that. The fundamental truth of this she had, indeed, long taken to heart. She believed in it thoroughly. So thoroughly

that she intended it to be a guiding axiom throughout the rest of her life.

Which was one reason why that very attractive body of hers had never been "touched"—not in a serious sense, at least. From an early age, after listening to stories from older girls, she had resolved to keep men at a distance. She wasn't going to be "easy." That led to disaster. If she were to realize her ambition, if she were to obtain possession of what she wanted, she must make use of men and not allow them to make a plaything of her. So she had kept herself untouched; never had she freely surrendered her breasts for caressing, whilst a hand tentatively on any part of her leg had been instantly shaken off. She had not used the current cant idiom: "I don't like that thing," or, "If I had thought that you were that sort of fellow, I would never have come out with you," because she considered such humbug contemptible. No; an icy look, a monosyllabic "Please!" and there had rarely been any further trouble. If she had been, she would have felt fully competent to deal with the situation; the need had never arisen. With her face and walk, she had been pestered by men—all kinds of men—for years. But always she had been the master-mind: she had played on men as a musician plays on so many instruments. Never had any one of them been allowed to dominate the situation. It had been amusing occasions to watch men working themselves up into a delirium of passion, only to say casually at the critical moment, "Shall I go now?" The Common could have told some stories of the description; even the seat on which she and Tom Farrar had sat that night.....

Tom Farrar. She now came back to the boy, the meeting with whom, she was convinced somehow, was to prove a turning-point in her life. Not that she intended to abandon all of her previous ideas because of him; but there was something about this young reporter which singled him out from all other men she knew. He was undoubtedly very attractive; he had a personality. She had recognized this at a glance; that was why she had looked at him at the bottom of Fernbrook Road. She had expected him to follow her—men always did if she gave them that sidelong look, half-provocation, half-apparent indifference—but she had not expected the encounter to turn out in exactly the way it had done. To her surprise, this sportily-dressed

man had proved himself to be an idealist. His reverential attitude to her was gratifying, if amusing. It was possible that in a weak moment—she must guard against that weak moment—she might feel inclined to give to him what she had given to no one else; she was capable of it. Her former rigid chastity had not been due to coldness (she was not Edwin Latimer's daughter for nothing), but because she realized that her body was her sole stock-in-trade, her capital, her All. She mustn't squander it; if she did, she would become bankrupt. Then, in a reckless moment, she might make such a fatal mistake as her two sisters Ursula and Ivy, marrying the first thing that came along. Poor as she was, hating her present surroundings, she was not going to turn traitress; marriage for her was not going to be merely a means of escaping. Before she would subsidize herself by falling into matrimony, she would have to be very certain of the future. It was almost too much to hope that she could do as well as Flossie Trowbridge, whose luck had been phenomenal: Flossie, working at a shoe-shop in Downside, had had a sudden row with her "boy," had thrown up her job, had gone to London on spec.—and the first night in Regent Street had met a man who turned out to be an Italian Count. Yes, a *real* one! Thinking she was a beginner at the oldest game in the world, he had taken her back to his flat—only to fall passionately and sincerely in love with her, after she had told him her story. They were married in a week's time—and Flossie was now living in some fabulous Palace in Venice. She wrote to her occasionally.

Would such luck ever come *her* way? Unless it did, she would remain as she was. At least, she was mistress of herself now—and if she got that new job in Beaman's, the local Bond Street costumier's, she would be able, perhaps, to leave Ashburton Gardens and set up a place of her own—even if it was only a combined room.

So, as she slipped a thin nightdress over the body she had been admiring so long, Maud Latimer found that life was not nearly so drab and uninteresting this night as she had often considered it to be. Tom Farrar had worked some kind of magic with her; but it was not the boy himself, but the effect his words had had that sent her gratified to bed.

And the last thought that came into her mind as she laid her head upon the pillow was the reverential manner in which he

had bent over her hand as she had said: "I am Maud Latimer. Why, she might have been a queen . . .

In her day dreams, sitting alone, she had often said those words. They had served as a stimulant when she was depressed as a tonic when the future seemed so hopeless.

"I am Maud Latimer!"

She breathed the words again now, as though it were an advertising slogan from which she hoped to gain a fortune.

CHAPTER THREE

THE WORLD IS ALIGHT

I

TOM told no one of his tremendous news: he kept this secret to himself. He felt he had sufficient reason. In the office they would merely laugh at him, whilst he had never taken many of his confidences home. He had not the kind of horror for that.

As a matter of fact, sad as was the circumstance—occasionally he admitted this much to himself—"Rosedene" for the past five years, that was, ever since he had started newspaper work, had been merely a place in which to sleep and spend listless such little time as the *Tribune* did not claim. He never found it comfortable there, and was always glad to be out of it. When he heard other fellows talking about the good times they had at their homes, he had a quick, vivid sense of resentment against his own stifling family atmosphere; but, realizing that there was nothing to be done about it, he always endeavoured to dismiss the subject as quickly as possible.

The Farrar family consisted of four people—his father, his mother, his sister Agnes and himself. All four of them were such violently conflicting temperaments (with the possible exception of his mother) that the usual atmosphere was one of impending storm and ever-increasing tension.

Tom was fond of his mother—and he would have been mu-

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curious trait of his father's; he was one man in the house and another man outside: he would be extravagantly buoyant away from "Rosedene," but directly he turned the corner leading to his home, he would "put on his face," as Agnes had once described it, and belch forth all kinds of complaints immediately he reached the front door. Saturated as he was in Dickens (although old Wigmore, the *Tribune* Editor, had once warned him not to take the great Victorian novelist seriously: "He has more faults than virtues, my boy"), Tom had often told himself that if Dickens had met his father, Joshua Farrar would have become as immortal as any in the long galleries of pen portraits that the genius of Gad's Hill had given to the world. As it was, he enjoyed a purely parochial reputation.

II

On the morning following his meeting with Maud Latimer, Tom came down to breakfast humming a tune. Although it had been a long time before he had dropped off to sleep the night before, he had slept without interruption until eight o'clock. Then, called by his mother, he had run a cold bath, got the circulation into a glow by the aid of a rigorous towelling, shaved quickly, dressed carefully and had gone downstairs, feeling that the world was alight.

He received the usual shock when he caught sight of his father sitting crouched over the fire, perusing lackadaisically the copy of the *Tribune* that was delivered each morning at "Rosedene."

He put forth an effort.

"Morning, father," he said cheerily.

"Morning my boy," returned Joshua Farrar in his habitually mournful voice. Tom never heard that voice without mentally saying to himself: "Oh, God! Why does a person like that want to go on living?"

This morning, feeling that even his father's amazingly depressing personality could not put him off, he sat down at the table, picked up the copy of the *Daily Banner*, Fleet Street's brightest and most sensational sheet, and feasted his eyes on the front-page headlines. If he could have been given the dearest wish of his life—the dearest wish of his life prior to meeting Maud Latimer—that was—he would have plumped for a job on the *Banner*.



flung the newspaper on the floor and walked quickly to the door.

"Oh, come back, Joshua!" pleaded his wife.

"I'm going out!"

"But you can't go out, my dear.....you haven't had your proper breakfast yet."

At the door by this time, Joshua Farrar turned.

"I don't want any breakfast. If I can't find peace in my own home, I'll get it elsewhere."

The veiled threat that he would set up a separate establishment was another feature of the Farrar domestic proceedings. Whether his mother ever took the suggestion seriously, Tom could not decide; but now, feeling that all the joy of life had been crushed out of his day, and feeling, moreover, what a crying shame it was that his mother should have to put up with such a human abortion, he, too, got to his feet and, walking the few yards that separated them, put his arm round his mother's neck.

"Oh, my dear!" he said tensely; "what a blasted fool he is! He forces me to say things I don't want to say—and then he carries on like this! Come and sit down again and have your breakfast."

Although feeling that by rights she should side with her son—whenever a crisis arose, he proved himself to be a good boy—Mary Farrar was not able to throw off nearly thirty years' servitude to her husband's will. If she did so, she felt, she would be false to her duty.

"You ought not to have spoken to your father like that, Tom," she replied: "you know how sensitive he is."

With that Tom exploded.

"Sensitive be damned!" he cried. "Doesn't he think that other people have feelings? Ever since I can remember, this house and everybody in it have had to be subservient to his wishes.....Why can't he be a *man*, mother?"

She looked sternly at him.

"After all, he is your father, and you have no right to criticize him. If you were only a good boy, Tom, if only you would try to understand him better, then things would be different."

"They wouldn't be different—they couldn't be different! He's so wrapped up in himself that he has no thought for anybody

choke him: at length the oppressive atmosphere was too much: he swallowed his second cup of tea so quickly that some of it went "the wrong way," thereby giving him a fit of coughing, and, kissing his mother fervently, murmuring: "Buck up, darling, you don't know how sorry I feel for you!" he rushed away. There was still a good hour and a half before he need start to go to the office—he hadn't to be at the first Police Court until eleven o'clock—but to stay in the house any longer was an impossibility.

As he went out into the hall to get his overcoat and hat, he saw his father coming round the corner from the kitchen.

"I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings, Father," he said, conquering himself.

"That's all right, my boy," was the retort.

But Tom had known Joshua Farrar too many years to be taken in by this rejoinder; what his father really meant was that, having gained in his own specious and tortuous way another victory, he would consolidate the fact by moping sullenly for the rest of the morning. At every available moment he would pour his plaint into his wife's ears.

The trouble with Joshua Farrar—or, at least, one of the troubles—was that he had retired from business too soon. Three years before, having had an altercation with the head of his firm—he was a partner in a well known and prosperous firm of local stationers—he had taken umbrage at what, when analysed, turned out to be nothing but a poorish sort of joke; had announced his intention of leaving; had sold out his interest immediately, and had come back to "Rosedene" to spend the rest of his life in poisoning the atmosphere all around him, and in making everyone under his roof supremely unhappy and miserable. When questioned on the point of why he had left business at so early an age, he had given as his excuse, not the real reason, but the far more sympathetic one of "feeling unable any longer to cope with the strain."

What a stinking humbug! The fact that the man was his own father did not mitigate in Tom's eyes any degree of his general unsatisfactoriness. Now, as he walked down the path, and crossed the road to wait at the nearest 'bus-stop, he had a sense of burning resentment at having been robbed of a happy childhood—but he would have put up with that, if only he could have re-

specialized in articles of that description—moral uplift and cant of a similar description. All those he had previously sent up had been returned with the formal rejection slip—but he might have better luck any day now. Obsessed by this new interest, which had suddenly arisen, he did not stop to reflect on the incongruity of turning that morning's unhappiness at home into "copy." Eager now to get to work, he walked back to the 'bus-stop.

IV

Straight from the keen, invigorating air, he stepped into the frowsy, mephitic atmosphere of the Burminster Police Court. This plunge into sordid reality was necessary before he could indulge in any more dreams.

There had been a brief period when as a reporter he took the troubles of his fellow human creatures keenly to heart; he remembered very clearly how, during the first inquest he reported, he found the copy paper on which he was writing wet with his own tears! But that was when he was seventeen years of age—and very new to the business.

This state of affairs had not lasted very long; the next week at the same Coroner's Court he had written a whole column dealing with a double suicide, without a tremor either of the hand or of the nerves; in fact, he had been able to pass a joke with Nicolson, the *Bugle* reporter, on the subject of the warts that disfigured the neck of old Thursby, the Coroner's Officer, who was generally acknowledged to be the ugliest man for twenty miles around.

Now, as he squeezed into the narrow seat—the press benches were nearly full—he mentally cursed all malefactors and Fate's unfortunates alike. He soon heard whispers that there was the promise of a particularly "juicy" case that morning—and with Alderman Naylor Johns, who looked like the popular picture of a retired Admiral but who actually was in the wholesale iron-mongering business, as Chairman of the Bench, the proceedings promised some ribald amusement. Alderman Naylor Johns had a weakness for "sex" cases; pretending to be deaf—he could hear as well as the average man if he liked—he would ask the witnesses to repeat their evidence—"and don't be afraid to speak out, my good woman!" There was one historic morning, when a young girl, saying her piece in the witness-box, responded with

mother's distress. That his mother was passionately and sincerely fond of the incredible Joshua Farrar he knew—but this did not relieve his feelings to any extent. He felt it so manifestly unfair, so unjust, that a woman who spent her whole life, who devoted every waking thought to the man she had married, should be repaid in so gross and unprincipled a fashion. As everyone said who knew them both intimately, the type of woman Joshua Farrar should have married was the strong, have-no-nonsense type who, at the first sign of these temperamental spasms, would have taken him by the shoulders, shaken him soundly, and said: "Look here, once is quite enough with this sort of thing. You pull yourself together, or I shall leave you!"

If his mother had only done that in the early days, what a difference it might have made! For that his father was at heart a coward, he was certain; only a coward could persistently behave in the way he did.

III

Getting out at the Circus, Tom decided that, as he still had another hour to spare, he would devote it to exercise. He would pay a pilgrimage to the seat on which Maud Latimer and he had sat the night before!

Jumping on another 'bus, he got out on the edge of the Common and walked across in the direction of the Medway cliffs. The keen air blowing from the distant sea shook the cobwebs from his mind, sent the blood racing through his veins, and banished the storm-clouds from his face. Yet every now and again he lapsed into his former mood. Why was it that one person should be allowed to permeate with his misery all those around him? Why couldn't everyone be happy—like himself? What was the cause of all this unrest and disturbance?

As he tried to solve the problem, which he realized must have exercised the ingenuity of many greater minds, he saw in his mind's eye an article on the leader page of the *Banner*. It was headed:

WHAT I FEEL I WANT FROM LIFE.

BY A MODERN YOUNG MAN.

Swiftly he arranged his paragraphs, starting with a snappy opening sentence. He knew from constant reading that the *Banner*

THE WORLD IS ALIGHT

specialized in articles of that description—moral uplift and can a similar description. All those he had previously sent up had been returned with the formal rejection slip—but he might have better luck any day now. Obsessed by this new interest, which had suddenly arisen, he did not stop to reflect on the incongruity of turning that morning's unhappiness at home into "copy." Eager not to get to work, he walked back to the 'bus-stop.

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such remarkable fervour and wealth of detail that the crowded Court was shocked into astounded silence, before exploding in Rabelaisian mirth directly the Chairman of Magistrates boomed in his foghorn voice: "Well, I'll be damned! Very good! Very good!"

It is only fair to Alderman Naylor Johns to add that, directly he realized how he had offended against the proprieties, he apologized to the Court, coughed violently and said to the witness: "Please be more careful what you say in the future."

Wilcox, of the *Sun*, who possessed about the dirtiest mind of any man he had ever met, reminded Tom of this incident as Farrar sat down. He also went on to inquire if his neighbour "had heard this one?" Knowing that he was inevitably in for the narration of a story of the foulest possible kind (Wilcox specialized in these), he said curtly: "No—and I don't want to hear it. What else is on the list besides this filthy case?"

Although he had never gone to extremes, Tom, at the same time, had never been known as a prig; consequently his answer startled not merely Wilcox, but the rest of the reporters.

"What's up with you, Tom?" demanded the former; "getting pious in your old age?"

Tom turned round and snapped:

"No, I'm not getting pious; but I'm sick to death of hearing nothing but filth from you fellows. Why don't you wash your mouths out with some disinfectant before you start talking?"

Then, feeling that he had done something to live up to his newborn resolve, he concentrated on his work.

At a quarter to one, the Court rose. In the ordinary way, Tom would have gone straight back to the reporters' room, delivered his "copy," which he had already completed, and lounged about talking gossip with Pankhurst. But this morning he felt that he wanted to avoid Pankhurst; he would be certain to go into esoteric details about that monstrous barmaid's anatomy—and the very thought made him feel sick. So, instead of turning in the direction of Thomas Street, he slipped away down a side turning, went into the saloon bar of a quiet pub he knew, read through his "copy" to make sure that there were no mistakes, ordered a glass of beer and some bread and cheese, ate and drank, filled and lit his pipe, and then, avoiding the editorial entrance to the *Tribune*, turned to the right and went

words. As those who had been associated with him during his business years were well aware, Joshua Farrar had a genius for "weighing up" things. He did not have the usual excuse of a parent for keeping silent; one strict rule Tom had made very early in life was never to ask his father for a penny. That determination had dated from the day when, as quite a small boy, he had asked his father for a shilling with which to go to a football match. The request had been made in the street—and Tom had flushed all over his face when he heard his father raise his voice to reply:

"Where do you think I get the money from? Do you imagine I pick it up in the streets? Here's your shilling!"

The high-spirited boy had taken the coin, but only to fling it away in a paroxysm of justified rage.

"As long as I live, I'll never ask you for another penny!" he retorted.

He was then nine years of age—and from that day he had kept his pledge.

To be baffled and thwarted in his desire to do the decent thing was exasperating, but nothing new in his experience. What troubled him now was to remain where he was and not feel bored to death.

As a preliminary he sat down and filled his pipe.

"Been out for a walk?" he asked.

His father shook his head.

"No, my boy, I don't feel well enough to-day to go for a walk."

"I'm sorry—is it the pains in the head?"

A suspicious expression came into his father's eyes; evidently Joshua Farrar was not certain if his son was trying to catch him off-guard.

"I don't want you to mention this to your mother, my boy, but 'that' has been troubling me again," he said, after a silence.

This time it was Tom who hesitated. The mysterious "that" to which his father referred had long been a puzzle to him; and, evidently many years before Joshua Farrar had strained his back. How, when, or where had never been disclosed. In his father's reticence on the subject had been so masterly that little bit of information had had to come in the first place from his mother. Whether the disability

form of rupture, Tom was never able to judge; all he knew was that at the present period his father would refer to "that" and groan in the manner of a man whose earthly sufferings were almost beyond endurance.

"Why don't you have it seen to, Father? Have you asked Merritt about it?" (Merritt was the family doctor.)

"No-o, my boy," was the reply, accompanied by a shaking of the head.

"But surely you ought to? Perhaps Merritt could do something....."

"I am afraid it's too late now.....I shall have to put up with it, I suppose, for the rest of my life.

That was the maddening sort of reply his father had always given him whenever this baffling subject was broached. Why on earth a man who was able (to his own knowledge) to walk fifteen miles at a regular four-miles-an-hour gait should slump in that disconsolate attitude over a fire on a brisk autumn day and talk about a disability which, no doubt, could easily be put right, he found it impossible to comprehend; but, then, that was his father all over: an elusive, unget-at-able, perplexing, irritating personality.

Admitting defeat on this count, he went off on another tack.

"Read the paper?"

The fact was discernible in the many scattered sheets on the carpet. Another of Joshua Farrar's idiosyncrasies was never to put back a newspaper into its original form; after reading it he would scatter the sheets on the floor—for someone else to pick up.

"I just glanced at it, my boy."

"Interesting position in Germany, isn't it?" he persisted, the weight in his heart getting heavier and heavier.

"Yes, I suppose it is." (The previous day Hitler had announced that, in future, he would place himself in supreme command of all the armed forces in the country over which he had become dictator).

"Old Wigmore" (referring to his editor) "was talking about a book written by an American journalist which gives the real inside story about the Nazi movement. If you'd like to read it, Father, I can get it for you from the office."

Joshua, the never-jubilant, shook his head again.

"I don't seem to take much interest in reading now, n boy....."

That finished it. Waiting only long enough to re-light his pipe, the young reporter rose and walked to the door.

"Well, I'll go out and have a look at the garden," he announced. To have stayed in the room a minute longer with that stuffed image would have meant an explosion of some kind.

Because he had made the announcement, he was forced to keep to it. The way to the garden led through the kitchen, and there he found his mother, in company with Agnes, engaged in making marmalade.

Closing the door, he said fiercely:

"Why father persists in behaving like he does, God only knows! What's the matter with him? Why doesn't he go out and do something? Why doesn't he read, take up gardening—anything but sit there, moping. For a man his age, it's absolutely preposterous!"

His mother turned a round, placid face in his direction.

"It's all very well for you to talk, Tom, but you don't know anything about it," she retorted, with some spirit.

In her own way, his mother was often as maddening to him as his father. Mary Farrar was never able to see more than one point of view—and that point of view was always her husband's. To her, it was a perfectly natural thing that Joshua Farrar should be as he was; not possessing any imagination, she took him perfectly seriously. He was a man who suffered intensely—and therefore was deserving of every pity.

Somewhat to his surprise, Agnes took her brother's side.

"You're right in one respect, at any rate, Mother," she said "only those who have to live with him know anything about it."

Her mother turned on her sharply.

"Agnes, I don't want to hear any further remarks like that from you," she replied.

Tom summed up the brief argument with a statement that startled both his listeners.

"Well, I'm sure of one thing, Mother," he said intensely; "when I get married, I'll take damned good care I don't give my wife a thousandth part of the worry Father has given you."

Then, kissing her on the forehead, he went out into

Alone in that comparative quietude, he thought of Maud. Their marriage—for, of course, they were going to be married—would be the direct opposite to the marital misery the atmosphere of which had stifled him ever since he could remember. Maud and he would be happy; they would have the same interests; they would encourage their children (if they had any) to give them their confidence; they would be pals to them. His own father had begat his offspring in the manner of a man who had done something in a fit of absent-mindedness—and thus represented the consequent responsibility.

V

At half-past eight that night the Reporters' Room in the *Tribune* office was practically deserted. All the other men had gone out on their different engagements; only William Rideout and Farrar were left.

Now that the day's burden was over—Rideout took his duties seriously—the kindly-natured Chief Reporter relaxed. Lighting a pipe, he leaned back in his swivel-chair and put his hands behind his head.

"Your Late Night, Tom, isn't it?" he said.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I hope that nothing very big will break out."

It was the custom in the *Tribune* office for the reporting staff to be detailed to Late Night Duty in rotation. As there were eight other reporters attached to the paper, Tom's turn came round on an average about three times a month. The duty of the man on Late Night was to be on hand in case anything cropped up—a fire, a colliery disaster (a not uncommon occurrence in Burminster, which was a coal-mining district), the unexpected arrival of a visiting celebrity, and so forth. At midnight he was allowed to go; after that, the sub-editors were responsible.

Tom smiled at his Chief's remark.

"I hope it doesn't, too, sir," he remarked; "because I've got a bit of private work to do to-night."

Rideout was the type of man to whom one could talk freely. Tom had often wished that the Chief Reporter had been his father; he would willingly have exchanged Joshua Farrar for him at any time.

As though appreciating being given the confidence, Rideout

encouraged enlargement on the subject.

"I've been thinking a lot about you lately, Tom," he returned; "although I didn't want to lose you, of course, I really think that it's about time you began to move on. There's not much real chance for you here, you know."

"I've been thinking the same thing for some time, Mr. Rideout—but now something's happened that.....well," he concluded, "I don't think I want to leave Burminster after all."

The older man smiled.

"A girl?" he queried.

"Yes, sir," said Tom, and although he felt himself flushing, he did not mind. "But, of course, it will mean that I shall have to earn some extra money somehow—that's why I'm writing an article to-night, which I shall send to the *Daily Banner*."

"What's the subject?"

"Well, perhaps you'll think it ridiculous....."

"No—I shan't. Tell me."

"Well, you know the *Banner* specializes in what they call 'problem' articles?"

"Yes, I seem to remember they do."

"I thought of writing something on the lines of 'What I Want from Life,' by 'A modern young man.'"

"A good idea—you ought to do it very well, too. Of course, Tom, you're bound to land up in Fleet Street sooner or later; don't make any mistake about that. There's no real future for a boy of ability in Burminster, you know."

"You don't think I could ask for a rise, I suppose?"

The Chief Reporter shook his head.

"Frankly, I don't think it would be the slightest use," he replied; "I will put it forward, if you like, and give a strong recommendation—but you know what the Sheepshankers are."

"I do," returned Tom glumly. And then, much to the Chief Reporter's amusement, he detailed the story which Partridge had told him twenty-four hours before.

"Well, I'll see what I can do—but I don't like to hold out any definite hope," concluded Rideout, as he put on his hat and coat.

"Good night, Tom, and good luck with the article."

"Good night, sir, and thank you."

This was the one hour of the working week most, to his youthful mind, there was a suggestion of romance in the smoke-filled air. It was at such times as these that he dreamed his dreams—and wrote off letters to the News Editors of the London newspapers. One favourite occupation of his was to get down the current copy of *Who's Who* from the big shelf over Rideout's desk, and look up the biographies of famous writers. It was fascinating to read what they had done, where they lived.....It never occurred to him, being essentially of a modest turn of mind, that he, too, one day might be numbered amongst these celebrities; it was sufficient for him to read about the others who had had their chance and had seized it with both hands.

Having made his telephone call to the headquarters of the local Police and the various hospitals—this was part of the ordinary routine work of the night—he settled down at his desk in the corner and pulled out a new pad from a drawer.

In bold, block letters on the first page, he wrote:

WHAT I WANT FROM LIFE

BY A MODERN YOUNG MAN.

After leaning back in his chair and thinking for a few minutes, he picked up his pen again and started to write swiftly. He had reached the bottom of the first page, a matter of words or so, when he heard the door open.

"Damn!" he said to himself. An interruption at this moment was annoying.

"Hullo, Tom."

It was Pankhurst—the one man he felt he didn't want to meet at that moment. Cecil would sympathize with his mood; he might even offer a few valuable suggestions on the composition of the article; but just now he wanted to be alone.

"Late Night?" queried the other, as he walked across the room.

"Yes."

"What's the matter? Got the belly-ache?"

"No; I'm all right," and then because he knew he would not be able to keep his secret much longer—Pankhurst had a

gift of extracting secrets from him: in the matter of his work at any rate—he said: “I’ve just started an article for the *Banner*; of course, they won’t use it.....”

“Why not? You ought to be able to do their stuff damned well.....What’s the title?”

For reply Tom pushed over the writing-pad.

Pankhurst scanned the words he had already written.

“Fine!” he summed up excitedly: “carry on, don’t mind me. I’m just killing time before taking Ruby to the pictures. Yes,” he went on excitedly, “I’m going to get her at last! She’s been holding me off for weeks—but to-night she’s promised.”

Pulling out a copy of a popular weekly periodical, he did not say any more, but, as though respecting the other’s mood, concentrated on his reading.

Tom wrote rapidly for another forty-five minutes. At the end of that time he found himself alone. Pankhurst had gone to meet his massive inamorata. And, consideratively, he had departed silently.

Reading through the eight closely-written sheets, he decided that it was not so bad. Beyond making a few minor corrections, he did not think he could improve upon it.

So, digging out a sheet of office notepaper, he scribbled a note, put the manuscript in a big envelope, addressed it to:

The Feature Editor,
The *Daily Banner*,
Fleet Street, London, E.C.4,

went into the Readers’ Room, asked if anybody had a stamp, and then, going out into the hall, dropped the envelope into the office pillar-box.

VII

It was now nine-fifteen, and time to think about supper. But in order to leave the office, he first had to report to the enemy—Hiram Wilberforce. He hated the job.

The problem was solved for him in rather an unusual way. Hearing a familiar voice outside the Reporters’ Room, he opened the door.

The Reverend William J. Burnside greeted him with a smile. “Hullo, Tom,” he said; “as I was telling you up—let me introduce my friend

There was a twinkle in the minister's brown eyes as he spoke.

Tom was momentarily taken aback. Although Burnside was a privileged person, he did not know what Hiram Wilberforce, who liked to think himself in charge of the ship at any time after he protestingly took his seat at six o'clock in the Sub-editor's Room, would say about him receiving visitors on the Editorial Floor.

That was his first reaction. But this soon passed. To he with Wilberforce. Then, when he glanced at the man standing just behind Burnside, he flushed with embarrassment.

"Raymond Hurlbut, the playwright?" he queried.

What a fool he must have looked, gaping like a yokel, when Burnside was doing him the favour of introducing one of the greatest literary figures of the day!

"He doesn't like it mentioned—but I believe Hurlbut has written one or two things for the Stage," returned the minister, his eyes twinkling more brightly than before. And then, while the young reporter watched fascinatedly, he said to the stranger: "Here, Ray, meet a particular friend of mine, Tom Farrar—he bound to set the world alight himself one of these days, so you might as well get to know him now."

The tall, elegantly-dressed man of late middle-age, who looked as though he might once have been an actor, held out his hand.

"There is plenty of chance for people who want to set the world alight—if they don't mind having their hearts broke beforehand," he remarked, in a slightly cynical drawl; "but don't mind me, Mr. Farrar; I have no bowels and my bile always overflows into my blood. That makes me, you see, a confirmed pessimist. I'm very glad to meet you all the same."

Burnside burst into a short laugh.

"The trouble with my friend Hurlbut," he said to Tom, "is that he always will talk his own kind of stage dialogue.....but what about coming out for half-an-hour? I dropped in because I thought it was just about your supper-time."

"Well, as a matter of fact, I was slipping out myself for a drink and a sandwich—but I shall have to tell our Chief Editor where I'm going."

"Tell him the Crown Hotel," retorted Burnside. And Tom's eyes opened in wonder—for the Crown was the mo

expensive hostelry in Burminster—the Free Church minister went on in his breezy style: "I realize the responsibility of having two such famous writers as my guests," and with that he dug Tom in the ribs. "The drinks are on me," he added.

The young reporter entered into the spirit of the thing.

"Excuse me just a minute....." he said, and crossing the corridor, walked into the Sub-editors' Room.

"I'm just going out to supper, Mister Wilberforce," he said, giving the Chief Sub-editor his customary title; "I shall be at the Crown Hotel if anything crops up."

As it was known that the Crown charged something like half a crown for a whisky and soda, everybody in the room looked up in astonishment.

It was left to Wilberforce to supply the inevitable comment.

"You appear to have expensive tastes for a junior reporter, young man," he remarked.

"Another misfire, Mister Wilberforce," was the quick answer; "the Reverend W. J. Burnside and his friend, Raymond Hurlbut, the famous dramatist, are outside—and I'm going over to the Crown to be their guest."

"You say these men are friends of yours?"

Wilberforce could not repress the second thrust.

"Yes...particular friends of mine."

"Very well," conceded Wilberforce, making a resolution to get someone to ring up the Crown Hotel and bring the reporter back within a few minutes, even if nothing important did crop up in the interim.

But one cannot overrule the habits of a lifetime; as the young reporter left the room, the Chief Sub-editor called after him:

"You might get an interview out of Mr. Hurlbut—but I don't want more than two 'sticks.' "

"I'm off duty for the next half-hour," was the swift retort.

VIII

In such stimulating company, the time passed quickly. Tom was just through his second sandwich when a waiter came up to the table.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but are you Mr. Farrar, of the *Tribune*?"

"Yes, why?"

going to be called *The Pilgrim*: that's the present title, at least, and it's supposed to deal with this new Marriage Bill. . . . But I can't tell you any more about it than that: I don't even know that it will ever be produced... You'd better confine yourself to a few lines of character sketch."

With that, Tom rose and held out his hand.

"This has been marvellous," he said. "Oh, can I have your address in case I find I have the cheek to write?"

With a smile, Hurlbut brought out his wallet. From it he extracted a card.

"There you are—if I'm away, the letter will be forwarded."

Having carefully put the card into an inside pocket, Tom shook hands with Burnside.

"As for you," he said, with a touch of humour that brought a smile to the ex-collier's face, "if I get to Heaven first, I'll loan you out a special harp. Don't get up," he went on to adjure; "in any case, I really must be popping off now. If I don't, I shall be at the sack...there may be a fire or something waiting for me when I get back to the office—what a life!"

Finishing his whisky and soda, he sped away.

The minister looked after him with eyes that held affection.

"A very nice boy that, Ray," he said reflectively; "I wish he were my own son."

"Yes; a nice lad," supported the dramatist; "perhaps I'll be able to do something for him one of these days. You never know."

And then, being something of a self-centred egoist, as men who have achieved real greatness are bound to be, he returned whole-heartedly to his meal.

IX

Back at the office, Tom confronted the irate Hurlbut.

The Chief Sub-editor's face twitched with anger.

"What do you mean, young man, by sending me back such an impudent message?" he demanded.

Buoyed up with all the wonderful things that were happening to him—the world was alight for him all right—Tom replied with spirit.

"Well, in the first place, I'd scarcely got into the Croft before the message came, and secondly, I was busy interviewing

But that won't be yet, will it? Not for years and years and years and years! At least, I hope not. You're wonderful! Marvellous! But there I go again

I shall be coming round to-morrow night. At present, I have the night off—but one can never tell in this job. In any case, I'll send you a wire as soon as I know definitely how I am fixed for the evening. You're such a sport that I know you will understand.

Monday I'm going to take you to the theatre. To the Regent. I don't know anything about the play—but it will be such fun being together. Oh, my darling . . . !

So keep Monday night open, won't you, whatever anybody else wants you to do? I'll tell you all about it to-morrow night.

Meanwhile, my love, my dear—

Yours,

Tom Farrar.

Reading it through, he did not know what effect it would have on the girl to whom he had written it. But it expressed his feelings so well, so aptly, that he did not alter a single word. He was like that—and Maud would have to get to know it; he always wrote exactly as he felt; there was never any reticence, any reservations: what was in his mind, he put on paper.

XI

Maud read that letter on her way to business the following morning. "Never a good one in the morning," as her mother (habitually and out of necessity an early riser herself) put it, she had stayed in bed as usual until the last possible moment.

Rushing downstairs to gulp a cup of tea and snatch up a couple of pieces of bread and butter from a cracked plate, she was momentarily halted by May, her sister, pushing a white envelope across the table.

"Here's a letter from your boy friend, Maud," she giggled.

It was not so much the knowledge that the steely eyes of her mother were watching her that kept Maud from opening the letter, after taking a quick glance at the writing; it was not the fact that she was incurious; the sole reason why she pushed the envelope hurriedly into her bag was because she was in rather more of a hurry than usual that morning.

As she swallowed the last mouthful of food, her father came into the room.

"Good morning, Maud."

"Good morning, Father."

Even at this time of the day they were friends, and greeted each other civilly—a circumstance that always irritated Mrs. Latimer. Feeling on such occasions that she had been pushed outside a barrier, erected by her husband and daughter to enclose them exclusively, she now commented sharply:

"Good morning, is it? I don't know what would happen, I'm sure, if I stayed in bed all day. It would be a nice look out for certain people's breakfasts, I'm thinking."

Edwin Latimer, used to these matutinal murmurings, kept silent. Maud, on the other hand, retorted in kind.

"Oh, for goodness' sake, Mother, stop grumbling! I know you've got a hard life—but so have I. If you were stuck in that filthy shop waiting on those freaks of women all day, you'd think so, too... Good-bye, father," stopping to kiss his forehead.

As the door closed behind the departing bread-winner, Mrs. Latimer voiced a further complaint.

"That's what you get for sacrificing yourself for your children," she said bitterly. "I wish sometimes that I'd never had any."

Her husband looked up from his plate of lumpy porridge.

"Why don't you put more salt in this stuff?" he replied.

Soon he, too, would have to take to the road; a person of multifarious minor activities in the past, he was now devoting his talent to the selling of books on commission—had a room in the £ and no expenses paid. It was a precarious—and fascinating—means of livelihood; and sometimes, especially in the early morning, he felt like consigning it to the dust.

III

As for Maud, she caught the tram which first went and changed its tortuous way through ~~many times~~ ~~There was an~~ alternative route to the dress shop; ~~but although this was a more~~ pleasurable journey, it meant ~~that of the morning of~~ ~~time in walking to the top of~~ ~~her love of bed invariably meant~~ ~~that of sixteen~~ ~~mornings out of sixteen, she suffered~~ ~~bruises on her body by getting on~~ ~~The Burminster Tramways~~ ~~the most inefficient and uncomfortable~~

CHAPTER FOUR

CROSS-CURRENTS

I

IT was shortly after eleven o'clock that Ivy came into the shop in Mainwaring Street. At the moment, Maud had just got rid of an elephantine creature who had endeavoured for thirty-five minutes with singular lack of success to cover her outsize proportions with sylph-like garments. The result was "a scream," as Maggie Tilden had remarked to her fellow saleswoman.

Maud stared as she saw her sister walk down towards the fitting-room outside of which she was standing; Ivy Musgrave being a snob, she usually strenuously avoided the cheap dress-shop in which her sister worked. But now Maud noticed with surprise that Ivy's thin nostrils were dilated, and that her splotchy face was twitching with excitement.

"I haven't really a minute to spare, Maud," her sister said, when she reached her side; "I'm just on my way to see George.By the way," speaking with the casualness which Maud knew from experience masked her real object in coming there that morning, "George and I have been talking the matter over, and we both feel that if you are serious about this young reporter, you should bring him along and introduce him to us. 'matter of fact"—when excited Ivy was apt to lose the precision of speech on which she so prided herself—"s'matter of fact, George and I are having Mr. Slaney to supper to-night."

The name was new to Maud, and she cut right down to bed-rock by replying:

"Who on earth is Mr. Slaney?"

Ivy burred.

"He's the new dentist at the end of our road. He's taken over old Burbridge's practice.....must have paid thousands for Such a delightful man.....and so kind.....He stopped two my teeth last week—and it didn't hurt a bit.....I told George, and George said: 'It's always as well to know a really decent dentist'—that fellow Morrison he's been going to is no good at

are we going to leave it, then?" she demanded finally, before turning away.

Seeing that she had the other more or less at her mercy now, Maud relented somewhat.

"I'll see what Tom says. If he agrees, we'll be round about half-past eight——"

"That means waiting supper."

"Well, don't wait if you don't want to.....I'm not at all sure that Tom won't prefer to go to the pictures or take the 'bus up to the Common."

At that, Ivy's never very secure temper completely snapped. Its moorings.

"He can't be much of a gentleman to want to do such a thing as that," she said between clenched teeth.

"That's all you know about it.....in any case, you'll have to go now; 'Madame' will be chucking you out if you don't."

Her bottom in the air, Mrs. Musgrave went.

II

With his brown tweed overcoat, wash-leather gloves, and green soft-felt hat, which he had arranged at the usual rather rakish angle, Tom Farrar at eight o'clock that night—the time for the appointment—certainly looked distinguished enough to be taken anywhere: on all visible counts, Maud decided, he was several degrees above anyone already on the calling list of the Musgraves.

Maud was waiting at the corner of Ashburton Gardens and was gratified by seeing the eager look in his eyes as he swung round from the 'bus stop. Really, he was astonishingly good-looking—so attractive that the average girl would have been fully prepared, no doubt, to make a complete fool of herself over him. Her own feelings were of a different sort; she wasn't able to single them out very well, but two main impressions rose to the surface. The first was that it was very soothing to her vanity to know that this boy (who could have had any girl within reason) was so keen on her, and secondly that if she had been in the position of that Russian queen—whatever her name was—who kept a male harem, she certainly would have made Tom Farrar Principal Favourite. Beyond that, however, she wouldn't go.

In his eagerness to show his appreciation, he stopped and stared, admiringly, into her face.

"You are a very wonderful girl, Maud; far more wonderful even than I thought you were at the beginning."

She smiled in a manner that rather puzzled him, but which he put down to good-humoured protest at the warmth of the compliment he had paid her.

Then: "You don't know me yet," she said. "And now," speaking more quickly, "I want to tell you who Ivy is."

"Your sister, I take it?"

"Yes. The only one who is married...so far, although my second sister, Ursula, is engaged. Ivy—you'll think her an awful fool, I'm afraid—is married to a man named George Musgrave——"

"The fellow who keeps that fake antique-shop?"

She laughed.

"Yes. How did you know about the fakes?"

This time it was Tom who laughed.

"Remember, I'm a newspaper-reporter, and newspaper-reporters have to get to know everything. So be careful," he went on in a tone of jesting warning; "if ever you have any secrets I shall be certain to find them out."

"I'll be careful."

"So your sister Ivy married George Musgrave.....I'm afraid I was a bit rude just now," he added.

"Not worth bothering about. George is just as much a fake—as a man, I mean—as most of the things he sells. He's a snob, too, and his wife is worse. So you know what I've let you in for."

"I shan't mind.....with you there."

But all the same the prospect was somewhat unnerving. In the ordinary way he hated formal social gatherings, one reason being, perhaps, that he had never had time to cultivate them, whilst another was that he went to so many public functions in a professional capacity that the very prospect of being thrown into close proximity to a number of strangers for any length of time was nauseating.

"You're too sensible, I hope, to pay any attention to what my brother said just now?" Maud remarked, as they turned the

corner of Merton Road; "I'm not trying to lure you into a false position—don't think it."

"I know that," he replied warmly.

"I'm not a hypocrite, at any rate. What has happened is this: when I went home after seeing you for the first time, the family wanted to know where I'd been—they're always so infernally inquisitive—and I told them I'd met a very nice boy—young man, I suppose I should have said: I must be careful not to offend your sensitive nature (you have a sensitive nature I'm sure!)—and then, of course, there was the devil to pay. Everybody except my father—you'll probably like my father—he's a sport—began talking at once...I can't even begin to describe what it was like!

"Ivy, my married sister, was there. I'd better tell you a little more about Ivy. You know already that she's a snob. Well, because she married George Musgrave, she fancies herself immeasurably superior to all the rest of us—she likes to be considered the Head of the Family sort of thing.....I expect this is boring you terribly, isn't it?"

Turning to look at her, Tom shook his head.

"It's damned interesting.....Carry on! In addition to all the other things, you've got a sense of humour."

"Rather a twisted one, I'm afraid."

"I like twisted senses of humour—the newspaper business breeds them," she was told. "Let's get back to Ivy! Does she cling?"

"To her husband? Yes—like a.....whatever do you call those creatures.....?"

"Limpets?"

"That's it—like a limpet. In addition to being a snob, she likes to be looked up to and 'considered,' as she calls it: she can't bear to be left out of anything. She calls it 'doing her duty,' but what it really amounts to is sheer 'nosiness.' That's Ivy: I'm telling you all this because she's almost certain to patronize you. But don't be patronized: be yourself."

"You bet I will. But why on earth are we going round there?"

"Because, my dear fool, she rushed into the shop this morning and started to warn me about the possible consequences of 'picking up' strange young me

I AM MAUD LATIMER

Hell—and I certainly should have done if I hadn't been so proud of you that I'm determined to show you off to her and her mutt of a husband. But if you think there's going to be any nonsense about 'getting engaged,' or any rot of that kind—well, forget it! Because all you and I are ever going to be are good friends."

It was like a blow over the heart to him.

"But I love you, Maud!" he protested.

"Don't be stupid! You meet a girl for five minutes, and you swear you're in love with her! Now," apparently relenting at the expression of real pain which had come into his face, "be satisfied with knowing that I'm proud of you.....we're really quite a good-looking pair," flashing a glance at a long shop mirror they were approaching.

"You're.....you're.....marvellous!" declared the young man by her side.

IV

Oswald Slaney was every inch a dental-surgeon (cheaper professional species). He was dressed in a neat-fitting grey suit (ver collar, round which was twined a tie wholly in accord with the suit that draped itself round his somewhat gaunt frame. His face was long and, beginning with a forehead that was too pronounced because its owner was suffering from incipient baldness, and a nose that was too big, ended in a chin that was pointed. The general colour-scheme of Oswald Slaney was dullish grey, and he would have appeared wholly insignificant if it had not been for the superior smile which appeared a permanent fixture with him. This was slight but unmistakable.

Tom Farrar disliked him on sight. His knowledge of human nature, gained through five years' experience as a news-reporter (and there is no keener judge of human nature than a journalist, for the very nature of his work makes him a realist), enabled him to "place" this man of fifty immediately: he classed the dentist as a self-satisfied, egoistic prig. He was wrong.

Mrs. Musgrave gushed at
 "My husband, Mr. Musgrave
 his button of a mouth and
 "Mr. Slaney....." Th

Musgrave looked at Tom.

"Let me see, Mr. Farrar, the *Tribune* is a Liberal paper, isn't it?"

"Yes, Mrs. Musgrave, it's supposed to be."

Oswald Slaney waved the cigarette which was suspended between two abnormally long fingers (grey like the rest of him) in the manner of an orchestra conductor waving a baton.

"I'm afraid" (slight cough with that irritating smile in his beam) "that I don't quite follow that."

Tom turned in his chair.

"It's easy enough to explain," he replied; "the two men who actually own the *Tribune* are Liberals, or say they are, but the leading articles are written by a man who boasts he always votes Conservative, and the Editor himself is secretly a Socialist."

The lantern jaw of the dentist dropped.

"Well.....well!" he ejaculated; "I never heard of such a thing; have you, Musgrave?" He was deeply grieved by the revelation: that much was plain.

The antique-dealer blew cigar smoke from his absurd mouth. He looked like a doll performing some obscure act.

"I can't say that I'm altogether surprised at what Mr.... Mr....."

"Farrar, Daddy," replied his wife.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Farrar....." Pausing to emit another cloud of smoke, he went on: "No, I can't honestly say that I'm surprised at what our young friend here has told us. Journalism to-day I believe to be thoroughly corrupt." With this piece of thunder, he leaned back, and the only further sound that came from him was an intestinal rumbling.

He hoped that would settle this upstart. He'd give a piece of his mind for paying him so much attention. It made his blood boil to see the fellow sitting there, apparently entirely at his ease. The whole affair was a hopeless mess-up; it had taken him long to see that Slaney was attracted by Maud—a stroke of luck for Maud! But with this penniless reputation hanging on.....

George Musgrave had been nearly at bursting-point before, now he looked like actually exploding. For he was raked and aft by the very person whose future he had been considering.

"Don't be a fool, George!" said Maud derisively; "you know as much about newspapers as a pork-butcher knows about synagogues!"

Mrs. Musgrave inflated her entirely inadequate bosom.

"Maud.....!"

"Well, let him talk sense, then..... Besides, if papers are corrupt, as he calls it, what does it matter? We've all got to do jobs we don't like doing." She turned to flick the dentist with her goad. "You surely don't like peering into people's horrible mouths, do you?"

How much greyer became the grey man at that moment! Oswald Slaney had always considered his profession an extremely dignified one—and not merely dignified, but one catering to the best instincts of humanity. He had previously seen himself in the light of a benefactor; a man, in short, who devoted his life (at a proper fee, of course) to Public Service. It was extremely annoying now to be regarded as a person who spent his working hours performing distasteful and unsavoury probing operations; a sort of sanitary inspector, in short. And all the more annoying because he had been giving considerable time to the reflection that this girl was very, very attractive. Yes, very attractive. Her breasts, for instance..... The combination of circumstances caused something like a miracle to happen: into the leaden cheeks of Oswald Slaney, L. D. S., a sudden flush bloomed.....

He didn't know what answer to give to this direct attack, but he called on all his available forces.

"My clients do not have 'horrible mouths,' Miss Latimer; they take too much care of them for that."

"Of course!" quickly supported Mrs. Musgrave; "you couldn't surely have been thinking what you were saying, Maud?"

Her sister refused to show any signs of being discomfited.

"I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings, Mr. Slaney, but I've always considered a dentist has a dreadful job..... I should hate it!"

Not since his student days had the man she addressed felt so uncomfortable. To be exposed to every way—it was intolerable! He twitched and his veins in both his legs throbbed beneath

A man who liked to think that he held the whole world in thrall on account of the secret and violent contempt he had for the great mass of humanity, Oswald Slaney now suffered almost complete humiliation. Degrading as was the thought, he realized he would have given practically anything to have won this girl's interest and admiration. Instead, he had gained merely her contempt. Of what use now was his superior smile, his air of condescension? Her scathing tone had cut through both like a knife cutting through butter.

George Musgrave took up his duties as head of the house.

"I think we will change the subject," he said sternly; "Slaney, you will know exactly what value to put on such a ridiculous statement."

A toad under the harrow, the dentist smiled. He meant it to be a smile of supreme indifference, but, his soul snarling at him from within, it showed itself as merely a sickly smirk.

"I can only hope, Musgrave, that your sister will favour me with a call one day.....then I shall hope to prove to her that she is—er—slightly prejudiced."

"Oh, but I couldn't possibly afford your prices, Mr. Slaney."

The smirk increased in sickliness.

"If you would so honour me, I should be delighted to treat you free," he said, "as the sister of a very good friend of mine," and here he bowed in the general direction of Mrs. Musgrave.

Tom looked at his wrist-watch. If he stayed any longer, he felt he would choke. He had just one urgent wish in life at that precise moment—he ached to punch that mincing mummy of a tooth-puller hard on the nose—and as he couldn't see any chance of being able to fulfil this ardent desire, he wanted to get out into the fresh air. He hoped Maud would play up.

Like a trump she did.

"What time have you to be back at the office, Tom?" she asked.

He looked at his watch again. "Well, I ought to leave in a few minutes," he rejoined. He hated the lie, but something had to be done. He couldn't stick that atmosphere any longer.

"Oh, *must* you go?" wailed Mrs. Musgrave.

At that moment she hated her sister intensely; hated her more than she had ever done before. To think that this boy, glowing with health, joy of life and—oh, ever so many other things which

disturbed her even to think about—was throwing himself on such a shallow-minded, selfish creature as Maud! She felt wanted to warn him—to take him inside, holding his hand as she talked.....

"Yes, I'm afraid I must." In order to soften the blow—all, the woman, he supposed, had been very decent to him in her fashion—he added: "Thanks awfully.....I've enjoyed you immensely."

Something began to ache in Mrs. Musgrave's thin breasts; she smiled, preening herself after the manner of a hen who has just laid an egg.

"It's been such a pleasure—you must come again."

Her hand, as Tom had feared, was hot.

It was a worse ordeal saying good-bye to the antique dealer of whose personal antagonism all through the evening he had been so well aware, but he did manage to shake hands. He made no effort in that direction with the dentist, however. Oswald Slaney had the effect on him of unexpectedly encountering a slug.

Once outside, he took a deep gulp of the fresh air. He tried to do this unostentatiously because he didn't want to hurt Maud's feelings, but she was too quick.

"Feeling better now?" Her left hand was resting on the crook of his arm as she spoke.

He got into his stride, thankful to be able to use his legs; he had been cramped in the overheated Musgrave sitting-room, and it was a joy to be able to walk!

"Best leg forward, darling!" he rejoined, feeling that here was a comrade after his own heart. "You were a brick to get away like you did!" he said.

Maud laughed. She, too, was feeling the satisfaction of energetic exercise. Those beautifully-shaped legs of hers were keeping pace with Tom's more athletic limbs.

"Well, I could see you looking as bored as the devil, and I thought I would invent some excuse.....Ghastly lot, aren't we?"

Tom temporized. The Musgraves had bored him to distraction, it was true—the woman with her ridiculous Queen Victoria Suburbia society affectations, and the man with his absurd pretensions of being a man of the world with a

first owing to his state of mind—how could a fellow talk in such circumstances?—but, as he felt her body yielding, her breasts pressing against him, he choked out a "My darling, you're marvellous!"

If he hadn't torn himself away immediately after that, he felt he could never have left her.....

Maud had gone straight to her room, refusing supper. Something had happened to her that night—something which was disquieting. Her whole body seemed on fire. There was an ache in her breasts, and her legs threatened to give way beneath her. This was the first time in her life that she had ever felt herself impelled to surrender to a physical passion, and she did not know whether to be glad or sorry. Her emotions on the subject were very mixed: she had never intended to become a slave to her feelings in this way: on the other hand, this strange urge was very fascinating. It would have to be satisfied.

It was in order, partially, at least, to satisfy it, that with the door of her bedroom locked against intrusion, she went to a drawer in her dressing-table and took from it a book. The cover was frayed and very old, and the letter-press much ~~testamented~~. She had picked up this volume in a second-hand shop for five pence, a few months back.

The volume bore a famous title: *The Decameron of Boccaccio*.

Maud already knew most of these stories from memory. She had read them many times during the past nine months in an attitude of cold analysis. All these people were Italian, full of Latin fire; and, moreover, they had lived many centuries before, when life was not the commonplace thing it had now become. But, although she had been fascinated by them, the stimulation to sensual pleasure she had read about in previous nights (this book had to be perused secretly in the solitude of her bed room), had been merely a pleasant illusion of her senses: she had never been really stirred by it.

To-night was different: now, it was no longer a mere mental exacting revenge: she wanted with a fierce and burning demanded satisfaction.

It was in this highly excitable state that she turned to her favourite story. It was the story which she had always found

in her mind. So when supper was done, and they were risen from the table, she conferred with her maid, whether after the cruel trick played upon her by the Marquis, it were not well to take the good gift which Fortune had sent her. The maid knowing the bent of her mistress's desire, left no word unsaid that might encourage her to follow it. Wherefore the lady, turning towards Rinaldo, who was standing where she had left him by the fire, began thus: 'So! Rinaldo, why still so pensive? Will nothing console you for the loss of a horse and a few clothes? Take heart, put a blithe face on it, you are at home; nay more, let me tell you that, seeing you in those clothes which my late husband used to wear, and taking you for him, I have felt, not once or twice, but perhaps a hundred times, a longing to throw my arms around you and kiss you, and, in faith, I had so done, but that I feared it might displease you.' Rinaldo, hearing these words, and marking the flame that shot from the lady's eyes, and being no laggard, came forward with open arms and confronted her and said: 'Madam, I am not unmindful that I must ever acknowledge that to you I owe my life, in regard of the peril whence you rescued me. If then there be any way in which I may pleasure you, churlish indeed were I not to devise it. So you may even embrace and kiss me to your heart's content, and I will embrace and kiss you with the best of good wills.' There needed no further parley. The lady, all aflame with amorous desire, forthwith threw herself into his arms, and straining him to her bosom with a thousand passionate embraces, gave and received a thousand kisses before they sought her chamber. There with all speed they went to bed, nor did day surprise them until again and again and in full measure they had satisfied their desire....."

The text was illustrated by a most artistic drawing, depicting of the lady and Rinaldo exchanging one of the aforesaid thousand passionate kisses. The widow's dress was lowered, displaying a most shapely bosom... ..

As she closed the book, unable to stand any more mental strain that night, Maud resolved to seduce Tom Farrar at the first available opportunity.

She had wanted to experiment with sex for some time, and Tom was the right person.

VI

Joshua Farrar was waiting up as usual when his son reached home. It was well past midnight, and the fire in the grate had burnt itself out; but irked by the resolution—the almost fanatical resolution—which made him think he was doing his duty, he remained at his post, staring dully and apathetically at the reporter when Tom entered the room.

No one had ever been able to fathom the mind of the retired stationer—Joshua Farrar was an enigma even to himself—but as Tom walked in through that door, looking like a young god rejoicing in his strength and beauty, he had again that sharp twinge of jealousy that at such times as this amounted almost to a savage

In his secret heart Joshua Farrar longed desperately to be his only son: he craved for the exciting aids to life which utilized in such ample measure. But as these desiderata were not for him, and had never been for him, he fell back on his nary whining reproaches.

"If I'd known that you were going to keep such late hours, I never have agreed to you going into that newspaper office," he said. "Don't you ever think about anybody but yourself?"

At any other time, Tom might have flared up. But now he was too happy, too excited, too much in love with life to reply in

Usually when he was attacked in this way, he felt an over-riding sense of regret that the other was so oddly inhuman and unnatural, but now he went across and patted his father on the shoulder.

"I know I'm late, old man," he replied, disregarding the astounded stare which Joshua Farrar gave him at the affectionate allusion, "but you needn't have waited up, you know."

He sat down in the chair on the opposite side of the hearth and pulled out his pipe.

"Have a cigarette, Father," he invited; "I don't feel like bed yet."

Joshua Farrar shook his head. If he had made the slightest attempt to understand this boy of his, then the limitless leagues of that separated the two might have been bridged. But Joshua Farrar, a preposterous left-over from the Victorian era, always felt it beneath his dignity to get down to the level of his son.

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So it was that now he said stiffly:

"I've waited up long enough—I'm going to bed."

And he rose.

The affection Tom had at that moment for the whole of humanity even took in the parent he could not help despising. He rose, too.

"Father," he said, and he was so earnest that they might have been the last words he was about to utter, "don't misunderstand me—but why aren't you like other people?"

The muddy face of his father further clouded.

"I'm afraid I don't understand you," he said.

Tom persisted.

"I don't want to be offensive; I don't want to hurt your feelings, but.....well, I'm so happy myself, tonight, that I feel I want everyone else to be happy, too. There's so much in life that a man like you—retired, and with nothing on his mind—could do, you know; you could play bowls in the summer or football matches in the winter, collect stamps, read up on the pictures—oh," uplifting his arms, "there's an infinite number of things you could do to find some interest in life. Why don't you, old man?"

He waited—and if Joshua Farrar could have reached it only he could have climbed down from the heights on which he habitually installed himself, if only he would have responded even partially in kind, then the rapprochement might have come. These two, who had always been on guard with each other, might have been friends. As for Tom, he would have felt that the only cloud in the horizon had vanished.

But—the bitter tragedy of it!—the habits of a lifetime were not to be foregone.

"It sounds to me as though you've been drinking," said Joshua Farrar, and, turning his back, he walked out of the room.

Tom remained to smoke the pipe he had already partly filled. Now that the fire had died down, the room was cold, but he didn't notice the temperature: he was thinking, now that the first shock of his father's refusal to meet him on common ground had passed, of Maud Latimer. And it wasn't of the girl's body that he thought—the intrusion of the sex element that night, indeed, gave him a sense of shame: he felt that that last passionate embrace which they had had at the garden-gate should not have happened—but of the girl herself.

he felt like a pilgrim reaching the gates of Paradise after a long and apparently meaningless journey, only to be denied admittance. He was beating upon them with his bare hands, but they opened not.

For the first time in his life he now hated himself—hated himself with a virulence that was surprising. Not only himself but everything appertaining thereto: his varicose veins, which he now visualized as subject for ridicule (what would Maud Latimer say if she saw him taking off his elastic stockings?); his style of dressing—how different this was from the sartorial buoyancy of the young reporter!—the manner in which he lived; his self-repressions—and, yes, even his formerly beloved calling. It was a final, overwhelming sense of defeat that made him admit this much: he had built his pride on his occupation; he had nurtured his self-respect on the fact that he combined the *rôles* of professional man and public benefactor; he had formerly gloried in the fact that he worked with his hands as well as with his brain. The neat, white coat that he wore in his surgery had always been a symbol of self-respect, spurring him on.

And now this image had been completely shattered—and shattered by a slip of a girl!

Once again, he rose from his bed and walked. On a small table behind the door, there was a jug of barley-water left him by his housekeeper. Oswald Slaney was a barley-water addict; like some of the new electrical-cleaners, he believed it performed several operations at once in his interior. Very valuable and essential operations, too.

Summing it all up, he knew himself to be an unflattering figure for romance of any kind. He had none of the glamorous attributes to begin with, whilst he possessed various physical infirmities against which a girl like Maud Latimer would be bound to revolt. A fresh and more poignant sense of defeat swept over him.

But this did not last very long. He consoled himself with the reflection that many men in History's long roll had been similarly afflicted. There was Napoleon, for instance.....

What was the mere flesh compared with strength of will and tenacity of purpose? He had both of these in ample measure. It was this sense of moral strength that upheld him now. He put aside the gusts of flaming emotion which had almost pro-

trated him, and saw himself in almost the old satisfying light. He had dominated before; he would dominate again. The lessons of his life came back to reassure him; searching in the innermost recesses of his soul, he found hope.

Oswald Slaney was a man who had generally achieved what he had set out to secure. He hadn't been too particular in the methods used; but what man who sets himself a purpose was ever over-scrupulous? He told himself now that he would triumph in the end.

With this reflection, he schooled himself to sleep.

But sleep, when it came, was freshly disturbing. Perhaps it had been the unaccustomed heavy supper that he had eaten that night, but whatever the cause he had a nightmare.

He saw himself married to Maud Latimer. They were in bed together, his arms twined around her. But in his wife's eyes was a terrifying glare of intense hatred. She looked, for all her beauty, like a Medusa, with snakes twining in her hair. And what was that shadow behind her? It was a man holding a rope in his right hand. At the end was a noose.....

He woke up with a start, a cry spilling from his lips: the man with a rope had thrown it and the noose had settled round Maud Latimer's fair, rounded neck.....

VIII.

Tom, as he waited in the *foyer* of the Regent Theatre, was conscious of inquisitive eyes. It seemed to his excited fancy that everyone knew he was waiting for the girl who, when she arrived, would inevitably hold the centre of the stage. He was aware that his new dinner jacket-suit fitted well, that his black tie rested snugly and artistically against the winged collar, and that the stiff shirt looked immaculate. He had taken more than usual care, and had called in his mother to the ceremonious robing. He might have been a bridegroom going to his wedding. Which was precisely how he felt.

His mother, naturally enough, had asked questions. Fond as he was of clothes, Tom did not usually "dress" when he had to write a theatre "notice"; there was no occasion to do so. And the other opportunities for putting on "glad rags" were few. He loathed public dinners with the interminable prosy speech-making, at which a succession of pot-bellied men stood up one

form of jealousy that is known to human nature.

Sensing in an intuitive way what she was suffering, Tom became very kind.

"You'll love her like I do, Mother," he said. And then because he was so full of his subject, he told the whole story in a rapid spate of words.

His mother felt the hurt in her heart deepen; her breathing became difficult; every syllable he spoke was a separate arrow piercing her flesh.

"She allowed you to speak to her in the street?" was her outraged comment, when he had come to an end.

He stared at her, not understanding how his own flesh and blood could receive his confidence so coldly, and be so misunderstanding.

"Oh, what does that matter? And it was my fault. Directly I saw her, I felt I had to speak to her and know her.....You see darling, I fell in love with her at sight—such things have happened, you know," he continued, that radiant smile lighting up his face.

He expected—and hoped—that she would relent; that the lines in her face would soften. But his mother did not relax her grim expression.

"No girl who would allow such a thing can possibly be any good to you, my boy," she said sternly. "You're young, Tom and you don't realize what the world is like. I'm glad you've confided in me but I'm sorry at the same time that you should have thrown your affection away on a girl like that."

He was stunned. He had guessed that this talk would be difficult, but the realization was almost more than he could bear. He felt sick.

"I'm not a fool, Mother, I know what the world's like—I ought to, working on a newspaper—and Maud, let me tell you, is a totally different type from what you think. Why won't you be fair?"

But, with that awful jealous pain ravaging her, she again shook her head.

"Better ones than you have been deceived, Tom," was her unswerving answer. "Have you told your father about it, yet?"

He drew away from her.

"Is he the sort of man to tell?" he asked bitterly; "has he

ever tried to understand anything about me?"

Mrs. Farrar kept to her dogma.

"He's your father; don't forget that."

A bitter protest rose to his lips. He could not repress the words.

"You needn't remind me! Oh, Mother, I thought you, at least, would understand—and be decent about it." All the frustrated love he had for her was embodied in the words.

She struggled with herself. She would have given the world to be able to throw her arms around this beloved boy of hers and console and sustain him. But the repression which had kept them apart for so long still kept her numb. It was as though she were in a vice, unable to escape.

And then came her final blow.

"I'm sorry now I told you," he said.

With that, she stood up. She thought that she would collapse. For the pain in her heart was intolerable.

"Oh, Tom, to talk to your mother like that!" she exclaimed.

Then the door opened and Joshua Farrar showed himself.

He looked at them for a moment, and then said in his whining tones: "Have you been upsetting your mother, Tom?"

The boy regarded him as though he were an enemy. But he did not reply.

"It's all right; I was just having a little talk with Tom," replied Mrs. Farrar, anxious to keep the peace.

"What about?" The words were snapped.

With that, Tom stepped into the breach.

"I'll soon tell you, Father. I've met a girl.....fallen in love with her.....I was telling Mother....."

With that muddy face staring so blankly at him, he was unable to go on.

"He wants to marry her!" cried Mary Farrar.

Joshua Farrar glanced in sidelong fashion at his wife. In that usually expressionless countenance, there now showed a slight animation.

"Responsibility often brings out the best in a man; it might do Tom good; he wants some steady influence," was the cryptic comment he offered.

Mrs. Farrar sank back on the bed. She knew what had prompted the words: from the moment of the boy's birth, he

father had been jealous of Tom. Now he saw an opportunity of getting the boy out of the house. Hating the speaker as she did for the suggestion, yet she had not sufficient strength of will to put up any challenge to the words.

Instead, she compromised—as usual.

"Of course, we shall have to see this Miss Latimer before anything definite can be decided—I mean about your engagement to her, Tom." The awful word "marriage" could not yet be contemplated with any degree of equanimity.

"I don't know whether Maud will want to come and see you," was the boy's bitter retort.

The memory of that mentally-disturbing scene came back to Tom now as he continued to wait.

"I hope you enjoy the show to-night, Mr. Farrar," said a voice at his elbow.

He turned quickly. It was Watson, the manager of the theatre—a tubby-figured, moon-faced man. The latter was well known to him. He might have been a decent fellow if only he could have thrown aside his sycophantic manner. Tom supposed that this crawling attitude was due to the man's anxiety to keep his job. With all the cinemas springing up, Watson must have gone through hell every time the Regent Theatre had a poor "house."

"I hope I shall." Strung up by the domestic disturbance at home, and worried because Maud had not yet arrived, he was rather curt. Privately he said to himself: "Oh, God, prevent me from ever turning into a worm like this! As long as I've got a brain, I'll never crawl to anybody!"

In the next second the whole world changed: he forgot his worries, and remembered only that this night was a night of nights for him. For a vision of dazzling beauty had come in through the swing doors. It was Maud.

He walked forward to greet her.

"Darling! You look marvellous!" he declared, using his favourite adjective again.

She smiled at him. It was a deep, unfathomable smile, but it set his whole being aflame.

"I'm so sorry I'm a little late, Tom—it was rather difficult getting away."

"What does it matter—now that you've come?"

As they moved towards the stalls' entrance, he heard someone say: "What an extremely handsome pair!"

IX

The play, *The Foolish Virgin*, was the work of that master of society-bedroom infidelities, Martin Pounceforth. Having achieved a nine months' run in the West End, it was now on tour. That alone would have been an important fact in itself, but what made this visit even more memorable was the circumstance that Gilbert Chertsey, who played Lord Dorset, the principal rôle, had come to the provinces for the first time in his illustrious career. Chertsey was a very famous West End actor; indeed, some said that he was such a superlatively good actor that his art concealed itself; he was not so much an actor as a performer! Be that as it may, this most famous West End "name" was now soliciting the suffrages of the provincial proletariat.

Before five minutes of the first act had passed, Tom was able to understand something of the anxiety that had been at the back of the theatre manager's remarks. Watson had been worried about the "notice" which the young reporter (whom he knew could have a somewhat vitriolic pen on occasion) would give to the piece. The week before, Burminster had flocked to the Regent to see a very successful melodrama. Melodrama was its favourite theatrical meat, but this airy little trifle, which consisted in the main of situations that the solid and stolid Burminster bourgeois could not be expected to understand, and a lot of brilliant if brittle dialogue which left them equally blank, was not up their street.

Signifying the fact in the usual way, they were "sitting on their hands," maintaining an attitude of remarkable non-enthusiasm. Whereas *Twice Dead* had been rapturously accorded, *The Foolish Virgin* was being received in increasingly sickening silence. The apathy of the audience was, indeed, remarkable. It was an extraordinarily "cold" house.

But Maud seemed to love it. With her face turned to the stage, taking in every word, she appeared to appreciate the nuance of every situation, and when the time came for Tom to leave her at the fall of the first curtain, she said:

"Oh, Tom, I *loved* it!"

He bent so low over her that he might have kissed her ear.

"So do I—but don't say anything. All these hicks look as though they want to commit suicide!"

Then, with a parting smile for her, he went towards the pass-door on his way to interview Gilbert Chertsey. Hiram Wilberforce had played true to form: he had induced the Chief Reporter of the *Tribune* to make Tom kill two birds with one stone: whilst he was watching the play as a critic, he had also to interview the chief actor and "get a couple of sticks out of him."

This talk in the first interval had been arranged beforehand through the touring company's press-agent, but, although the actor had been expecting him, Tom found the West End star in a very bad mood. At the moment the reporter entered the dressing-room, the actor was gulping a double whisky.

"Hullo," he grunted in the staccato fashion with which West End audiences were so familiar, "what the hell do you want?... Oh," looking at the card which his dresser passed to him, "so you're the reporter fellow, eh? Well," very bluntly, "I don't think much of your local audiences!"

Tom smiled. He was used to human vanity, and knew that this volatile quality was nowhere more prominent than in the person of a leading actor. Ego was often the latter's middle name. Moreover, through his reading and his close touch with current theatrical affairs, he knew that Gilbert Chertsey was very richly endowed in this respect.

So he softened his reply.

"Yes, I'm afraid they are rather sticky, Mr. Chertsey, but anyway, it's a grand play and yours is a marvellous performance."

The actor softened in turn.

"Have a drink," he proffered, giving the sign to the attentive dresser.

When his glass was charged, Tom got down to business, asking the questions which he had already decided should form the basic matter of the interview.

The two got on very well together. Chertsey evidently liked the young man, and was impressed by his knowledge of the Stage. The result was that when his dresser coughed, giving a

warning that it was time the interviewer should be gone, the actor said :

"What the devil is a fellow like you doing in a dump like this? You've got intelligence. You ought to be in London, my boy—London's the only place for you."

Tom smiled.

"I want to get to London—but I've got to find a job first. You don't happen to know anyone on the *Banner*, I suppose, Mr. Chertsey?"

The actor stroked his chin.

"The *Banner*?" he echoed. Then he turned to his dresser. "Do I know anybody on the *Banner*, Tripp?"

"You know young Mr. Stanton, sir," was the prompt reply. And from this Tom gathered that Tripp was the Crichton that the London gossip-writers had always declared him to be. According to these members of the *cognoscenti*, Tripp was the infallible *alterego* of his master; he was valet, dresser, general factotum and Inquire-within-for-everything.

"Well, make a note that I drop him a line about this young man here—do it now, Tripp. Don't forget!"

"I shan't forget, sir.....And now, Mr. Farrar, I really think that you ought to be going. The curtain is up and Mr. Chertsey has to be on the stage"—looking at his watch—"in fifteen seconds."

Tom sprang up from his chair.

"I'm terribly grateful to you, Mr Chertsey."

"Not at all." The actor made a large, fluent gesture. "Only too pleased. Don't forget to let me know when you do come to Town. We'll lunch at the Savoy Grill."

With these magical words ringing in his ears, Tom returned to the auditorium. Whispering an apology to Maud, who made reply in the form of a squeeze of his fingers, he settled back in his seat. It was a safe bet that he was the happiest person in the whole of Burminster that moment.

X

They were like two children as they got into the taxi which was to take them to the *Tribune* office.

"I shan't keep you more than about twenty minutes, darling," he said; "and you'll be quite all right—you can stay in the

waiting-room while I write my stuff."

It was a new experience, this sort of thing, going to the theatre with a man who actually wrote a criticism of the play, and she found it stimulating. Moreover, it would give her a good subject for talk when she next met Ivy.

Another taxi—he was being extravagant that night—bore them through the practically deserted town to Ashburton Gardens. The drive did not take long. Tom took advantage of the drive to say what was in his mind.

"My dear, we must get married!" he said, taking hold of her hand. "I don't mind admitting," he went on, with a short laugh, "that up to now marriage has always seemed the most asinine thing any fellow—especially one of my age—could do; but now it's all different. You know why," he said, squeezing her hand again.

It had been a wonderful evening, and she did not want to appear ungrateful. But this subject of marriage was embarrassing. She had not changed her views. She did not want to marry this boy, attractive as he was. He had no money. A little maidenly reserve, she felt, would not be out of place.

"Oh, but, Tom, we *can't* get married, dear; where's the money to come from?"

"I'm going to London. Chertsey, that actor fellow I interviewed to-night, is going to do his best to get me a job on the *Banner*. You'll come with me, won't you?" And, carried away by the force of his feelings, he put his arms round her and kissed her.

Maud kept silent. She liked being caressed by this boy; it gave her a quickening of all her senses. But she knew that he was unduly excited by the events of the evening, and decided that too much notice must not be taken of what he was now saying.

"It's all so in the future, darling," she replied, returning his kisses, "and we're both so young—there's plenty of time. Don't leave Burminster yet...I've only just got to know you."

He held her more tightly for that.

"God knows, Maud, I don't want to leave you—but I shall never get enough money to be able to marry you in this damned hole——" And then before he could say anything more, the cab had drawn up outside the neglected entrance to 216 Ashburton Gardens.

He got out and helped her to the pavement.

"Shall I wait, sir?" asked the driver, sensing another fare.

It was Maud who replied.

"No—you needn't wait," she said curtly.

"Very good, miss." Putting in his clutch, the taxi groaned—Burminster was noted for its decrepit taxicabs—away.

Tom, who had been surprised at the note of decision in Maud's voice, was still further puzzled by the look in the girl's eyes. They were misty and held a warm light.

"I hope you don't mind my sending him away, dear?" she said.

"No, I don't mind, of course...but it's late."

For reply, she took his arm and they began to walk up the worn garden path.

"Everybody will be in bed." Her hand pressed his arm. "You'll come in for a minute, Tom?"

Something held him back—he didn't quite know what it was, except that it might possibly be the Voice of Conscience.

"No, darling—not to-night."

"Why not?" Her face was now hard and determined.

"Well, it wouldn't be exactly right, do you think? With all your people in bed, I mean?"

The girl gave a short laugh, rather unlovely to hear.

"I never thought you were a prude!...Well, if you won't—you won't! Good night, Tom, and thank you for a very, very lovely time."

By this time she had opened the door with her latch-key and, without another word, or even turning her head, she had gone inside. He saw the door shut in his face.

Bewildered, he stared at its ungracious surface, and then walked slowly back to the gate.

He was fortunate to find a taxi at the top of the Gardens—otherwise he might have had to walk for at least a couple of miles.

XI

As for Maud, she picked up the letter addressed to her which stood on the living-room mantelpiece and, her face still dark and lowering, took it up with her to bed.

Not recognizing the writing, she she came to the end of the few words embossed notepaper, she burst into

Oswald Slaney!

It was *too* funny!

waiting-room while I write my stuff."

It was a new experience, this sort of thing, going to the theatre with a man who actually wrote a criticism of the play, and she found it stimulating. Moreover, it would give her a good subject for talk when she next met Ivy.

Another taxi—he was being extravagant that night—bore them through the practically deserted town to Ashburton Gardens. The drive did not take long. Tom took advantage of the drive to say what was in his mind.

"My dear, we must get married!" he said, taking hold of her hand. "I don't mind admitting," he went on, with a short laugh, "that up to now marriage has always seemed the most asinine thing any fellow—especially one of my age—could do; but now it's all different. You know why," he said, squeezing her hand again.

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XI

As for Maud, she picked up the letter addressed to her which stood on the living-room mantelpiece and, her face still dark and lowering, took it up with her to bed.

Not recognizing the writing, she opened it casually. But when she came to the end of the few words written on the heavily-embossed notepaper, she burst into a laugh.

Oswald Slaney!

It was too funny!

CHAPTER FIVE

INVITATION TO THE DANCE

I

AS she re-read the letter, Maud smiled in a manner which would have puzzled Tom Farrar if he could have seen her. It was not a pleasant smile, but as an insight into character, it was revealing.

The epistle was somewhat curiously worded:

Dear Miss Latimer,—

I hope you will pardon the intrusion (as it were), but I am writing to assure you that I was perfectly serious when I made the suggestion the other night at your sister's house that you should come to me as a non-paying patient. One's teeth are a very precious possession, you know, and in the case of such an attractive young lady as yourself, periodical visits to a good dentist—and I feel I can call myself that—are a necessity for the health and the retention of beauty.

I shall be happy to make any appointment with you that you may care to fix. Perhaps you will let me know at the earliest opportunity when I may expect you?

With very kind regards,

Yours most sincerely,

Oswald Slaney

Now that she had mastered this extraordinary communication she laughed over again. What a fool the man was! And how obvious was the meaning beneath those carefully-prepared lines. Why, the fellow's purpose was discernible in every syllable! The letter, indeed, merely strengthened her former opinion of him—he was smarmy and slimy.

At any other time, she might have dismissed the whole episode by tearing the letter across and flinging the pieces away. But to-night she was in a dangerous mood. The attitude of the boy to whom she had been eager and willing to give herself twenty minutes before had not only disappointed but incensed her. She felt furious. Furious, because the bounty she had

been willing to bestow had been declined. It did not matter to her in her present state of mind what influence had actuated Tom in saying "no"; it was sufficient that she had been thwarted.

Yes, she had been in the mood all right that night. Stirred by the play, the way people had looked at her in the theatre, by the kisses she had exchanged with Tom in the taxi, by the general unwonted excitement of the evening, she had imagined herself taking the place of the "widow lady of extraordinary beauty" in Boccaccio's tale. The refusal, therefore, of the young man with whom she had determined to conduct her first real sex-experiment had come like a slap in the face; she had felt stunned by it. Though she had managed to utter a few conventional words, as she closed the door in Farrar's face, she had cursed the reporter with a virility that would have astounded that young man. Gripped by fierce resentment, she was now willing to accept any opportunity that might present itself, and go to any lengths to punish the boy who she felt had insulted her.

Once again, as she sat in the chair with the missing castor, that slow smile of sadistic pleasure came to disfigure her face. This letter!—it was a weapon she could use.....perhaps. Although Oswald Slaney was a physical freak, yet he was a man in a good position. Tom Farrar, on the other hand, was ridiculously poor—yes, this letter was a weapon she could certainly use.

She brooded on the situation. Farrar had Slaney about: what was it he had said after leaving Tom's house? Something about hating the way "that fellow" was being treated? For what he had done to him—well, the newspapers would be taught to hate Slaney even more.

As her lips curled back showing her teeth, Tom made a resolve. She would not only take up this weapon but use it; the fool Slaney was already famous, and she was simply asking to be made use of; and in making use of him, she would be able to achieve two purposes. First, she would arouse Tom's jealousy to the highest point possible, and secondly, she would get something for nothing. There was nothing wrong with her teeth so far as she knew—but it only needed a little effort on her part to get to the shop five minutes before opening-time the next morning. Then she would sing Slaney up.

Tom continued to stare at the few words typewritten on the paper before him as though he were mesmerised.

Dear Sir, [the letter read]—
I am interested in the article "What I want from Life, by a Modern Young Man," and I shall be pleased to use it in the Daily Banner, if you are willing to accept a payment of ten guineas for the First British Serial Rights.
 Perhaps you will be good enough to let me have a reply by return?

Yours faithfully,
 O. F. Lewis
 (Features Editor).

Ten guineas! For work which had taken him just over an hour to do! But it was not the size of the cheque that caused him to wonder; it was the extraordinary thrill the knowledge gave him that he had at last accomplished his greatest desire—namely, to get a signed article in a famous London newspaper. True, his name had not been on the manuscript, except as an aside to the editor, but when he wrote accepting the terms, he would add a line to the effect that he would like his name to appear at the bottom of the article. No doubt this man, Lewis, who evidently knew good stuff when he saw it, would be willing to oblige him.

He was still standing by the side of the letter-box from which he had taken the envelope addressed to him, when Pankhurst entered the room.

"What's the matter, Tom? You look as though you've got the sack!" his fellow-reporter enquired.

For reply, Farrar passed over the letter which had come from the whole world to appear topsy-turvy. Pankhurst read it quickly, and then slapped his companion on the back. He appeared not only genuinely excited, but genuinely pleased. At that moment Tom realized one of the greatest truths, and that is that no one is so bad but who is apt to possess a modicum of good.

"This is marvellous, Tom!" exclaimed Pankhurst enthusiastically; "and now that you've made a start, nothing you! I've always said that you'd astonish the stiffest of

one day! Leader-page stuff in the *Banner*! God!.....Here Manson," he went on as the paunchy, middle-aged reporter with the perpetual frown slouched in through the door, "what do you think! Farrar's got a leader-page article accepted by the *Banner*!"

Manson thrust out his pendulous underlip and began to gnaw one end of his unkempt moustache.

"Well, personally, I'd be ashamed to see my name in the rag!" he retorted biliously.

Pankhurst's response was venomous.

"Time enough to say that when you *do* see your name in it—come on, Tom, let's get out of this place; it stinks!" And Pankhurst, looking more excited than the boy to whom Farrar had just thrown her first laurel, dragged his companion out of the room. As for Manson, he pulled a cheap briar out of his pocket, crammed it viciously with shag tobacco and began to smoke like a man possessed of a devil.

The devil in his case was a raging jealousy.

III

By the time he had been able to get rid of Pankhurst, he was genuinely pleased if somewhat surprised to note the other's enthusiasm, and was convinced that his fellow-reporter was more or less sincere in his attitude—Tom found that he had only twenty minutes to spare before arriving at the Burminster Police Court, where he was due to report the proceedings in the Number Two Court. He had been chafing with impatience during most of the time he had been forced to spend with his colleague. The news of this splendid happening had to be passed on; he must see Maud immediately. For the acceptance by the *Banner* meant more than a very welcome cheque; it represented a distinct step forward in his career. Why, if the *Banner* took one article, they would take others, and they might—who knew?—even offer him a position on the staff! With a definite contract in his pocket (he would be sure to get a contract! he could go to Maud and ask her to make him!

It was a very flushed-looking young man who walked in Madame Harting's five minutes later and inquired apologetically if he might see Miss Latimer. It was "Madame" herself

whom he spoke. This buxom purveyor of tawdry dresses for the masses was captivated by the visitor's manner, and she replied accordingly.

"Oh, of course—what name shall I say?"

"Tell her Farrar, will you, please?"

"Certainly."

Smiling to herself, and walking away with the mincing step that women of her type affect when they know they are under male observation, Madame Harting departed in search of her assistant.

Tom waited in a further fever of impatience. He was anticipating seeing Maud's lovely face light up with pleasure. That was one of the many reasons why he loved her, he told himself—this ability to share his pleasures and to sink her own individuality. But when, finally, he saw Maud coming towards him, he could scarcely believe his eyes; instead of appearing pleased, she looked distinctly hostile. It was as though she actually resented his presence.

Her first words increased this sense of bewilderment.

"You ought not to have come here," she told him coldly.

"You will only get me into a row with Madame. Why didn't you have more sense?"

He gaped. Was this Maud Latimer? Was this the girl he loved? Was this the girl with whom he had spent an evening of such delirious happiness only the night before? It seemed incredible.

"But I had such good news...the *Banner* has taken an article of mine...I felt I had to tell you..."

Horror now took the place of bewilderment; he saw her lips curl back in a cruel smile.

"How marvellous!" she replied sarcastically; "I shall be able to read it on the tram coming to business."

He caught hold of her arm.

"What's the matter with you, Maud? I don't understand you at all! What's happened?"

She froze him with a look.

"Don't you realize that you're making yourself very conspicuous?" she retorted; "let go of my arm at once, please! And I can't stay here any longer; I have my work to do."

Without softening the blow in any way, she released her arm and turned abruptly away. The last Tom saw was her rigid

100

100

been in a state of the most acute nervous agitation. His patients had suffered—one man, enduring agony through Slaney, not having his mind on his immediate business, had jumped up in the chair and had sworn volubly.

"Call yourself a dentist!" this maltreated one had cried; "you're more like a butcher! If I had only known what sort of a bungler you were, I would have gone somewhere else."

This was bad, but what was worse was the avowed determination of the speaker not to come near the surgery again.

"Once is enough!" he declared darkly.

At any other time, Oswald Slaney would have been stung to his professional quick; as it was, he put the incident out of his mind directly the patient had stormed away, still with one hand to his face. There were plenty of patients—he had too many on his books now, if it came to that—but there was only one Maud Latimer. And she was due by appointment at half-past six that evening.

He recalled every word she had said to him over the telephone.

"Oh, Mr. Slaney, thank you for your letter...It's most kind of you...I don't think there is anything wrong with my teeth—but I *should* like you to look at them if you wouldn't mind... The trouble is, I don't leave business until six...Would half-past six suit you?"

Oswald Slaney did not stop to meditate. It was sufficient for him that the girl for whom he had conceived such an overwhelming passion, was willing to visit him, if only as a non-paying patient.

"Yes, of course, Miss Latimer; I'll keep half-past six for you." And this, irrespective of the fact that half-past six was the time scheduled for Mrs. Rowbotham, one of his best-paying clients. But that old cow would have to be put off. He telephoned immediately...

In order that he should have the surgery entirely to himself, he then told his assistant that he could leave that afternoon at six o'clock sharp. Conscious, through the pangs of love, of his own physical shortcomings, he had not wished Basil Leadbeater to be present when the girl arrived. Leadbeater, a brawny, muscular young man of twenty-seven, who had masculinity written all over him—a shock of coarse, black hair, strong limbs and general air of intense virility, all proclaimed

that he was of the pronouncedly he-man type—afforded such a striking contrast to himself, that he feared the comparison which Maud Latimer, he felt certain, would make between them. And he was taking no chances; if necessary, he would terminate Leadbeater's engagement, satisfactory as the assistant had proved himself to be during the past nine months. Leadbeater could achieve as many "conquests" as he liked in other directions (he had a certain reputation, he understood, in that respect), but he was not going to have him encroaching on what he already considered to be his own particular preserve.

The girl had arrived on time. She affected a feminine reticence which he found charming.

"I don't really think I ought to impose on your kindness in this way, Mr. Slaney," she said, after they had shaken hands; "if I hadn't been rash enough to promise on the 'phone this morning, I shouldn't have had the courage to come."

He felt his throat swell and then contract behind the stiff, single-fold collar.

"Nonsense!" he managed to say; "I am more than delighted to see you. After all, your sister is one of my best friends—don't let us forget that! She has told me about—er—your circumstances, and I shall be very happy—very happy indeed—to be of any service. Now..."

And putting a hand on her arm—how firm and yet yielding the flesh felt beneath the thin blouse!—he started to lead her to the

liminary pronouncement upon the condition of her teeth, he had felt that he could not stand the strain any longer. He would either collapse, or make such a fool of himself as would ruin any future chances he might have.

"Now I'm not going to trouble you any further to-night," he contrived to say; "but those three teeth I have been telling you about will require stopping. That is the principal job, although there are one or two minor things I shall also have to attend to. But please, Miss Latimer, don't put yourself out—my time is entirely yours; remember that. Come to me after business hours and I can always arrange to suit your convenience."

She seemed almost overcome by the generous offer.

"But are you quite sure I shan't put you out, Mr. Slaney?"

"Quite sure." To such an extent were his nerves mastering him that he distinctly heard his dentures click. "My time is entirely yours—as I have already said," he went on.

"I don't think I've ever known anyone so kind," she told him.

He took courage at that, placing a hand on that lovely arm once again.

"And I don't want you to view the visit as entirely a professional one, Miss Latimer.....After all, as you know, I am one of your sister's greatest friends..."

He could not continue what he had been about to say; but watched her closely to see what effect the words had. One false step, and he would condemn himself for the rest of his life.

But the girl, instead of being put off, responded in just the way he had scarcely dared to hope she would.

"That does make the situation rather different, doesn't it?" she returned with a smile. "Of course, Mr. Slaney, I shouldn't have come to you at all—as a non-paying patient, that is—unless you had known my sister so well. It would have been—well, not quite nice, now would it?"

"But as it is, everything is thoroughly satisfactory," he replied; "and you must promise me one other thing, Miss Latimer; you mustn't be afraid of me.....I promise not to hurt you." The pressure on her arm increased.

Although she could have burst out laughing—what a fool the man was!—Maud controlled herself sufficiently to reply with becoming reserve:

"Oh, I have every confidence in you, Mr. Slaney. My sister has told me many times what a splendid dentist you are!"

Although the words were not entirely satisfactory, Slaney considered that they represented at least a partial encouragement, and so, gathering confidence, he went on:

"Don't you think it might be a good idea to extend the family friendship?" he suggested; "now that I have met you, I meanI'm a very lonely man, and I should be very grateful if I might be allowed to take you out occasionally. You're fond of the theatre, I suppose?"

"Very fond."

"And the pictures?"

"Oh, I often go to the pictures."

If he had not been so purblind, and if his passion had not temporarily clouded his usual cool and calculating judgment, the dentist might have been warned by the mocking gleam in the speaker's eye. As it was, like many another better man before him, he rushed into destruction.

"Then may I hope to have the pleasure some evening?"

He was pulled up short.

"Oh, I don't know about that, Mr. Slaney; you see—"

Slaney ground his dentures; his face becoming moist. He back-pedalled quickly.

"I'm afraid I have presumed too much; you mean that you already have someone to take you out in the evenings?"

Maud played with him like a fisherman with a trout.

"If you mean that I'm engaged, then someone has been telling you a lie!"

She made the statement with so much conviction that all his former hopes flared up again. Once again he rushed forward.

"One of the greatest mistakes a young girl—especially such an attractive girl as yourself, Miss Latimer, if you will permit me to say so—can make is to tie herself up early in life. I have seen so many tragedies occur through this."

She flashed a smile at him.

"Oh, I don't think I'll tie myself up to anybody—at least, not yet," she said, and Oswald Slaney's heart thumped in his narrow chest.

CHAPTER SIX

MARIONETTES' PARADE

I

SPRAWLED across the table, Tom Farrar blinked at his companion.

"Let's have another drink," he drooled. He was already very tired. It had been a hectic day. For several hours after leaving the cheap dress shop where he had received such astonishing treatment, he had felt dead inside. The cavalier manner in which Maud Latimer had behaved had stunned him more than anything he could recall.

He went about his various duties mechanically, fulfilling them because daily use had accustomed him to the task. It was just as though somebody else's mind and hand were hearing the words and putting them on to paper. Even the knowledge that the letter from the Features Editor of the *Daily Banner* was still in his inside coat-pocket did nothing to mitigate his sense of rebellion against the world.

Late in the afternoon, after he had finished writing an interview with a visiting eminent divine, the Chief Reporter called him over to his desk in the corner.

"What's the matter, Tom?" Rideout asked in his customary kindly manner.

"Nothing, sir."

The Chief Reporter persisted.

"But there is, my boy!" he countered; "I've been waiting for you ever since you came in three-quarters of an hour ago... look as though you were ill—what's the matter? Tell me."

But again Tom shook his head. This hurt was of a private nature that he couldn't divulge it to anyone.

"I'm all right, sir—don't you worry about me," he managed a feeble smile.

Rideout frowned. He had no wish to force the boy into a confession, if Farrar didn't want to give it to him, but all

he felt convinced that something had occurred that day to upset the lad seriously.

"Well, if you're all right, that's all that need be said—but in any case, what about an evening off? I won't give you an engagement to-night."

Thanking his Chief for such consideration, Tom went to the coat-stand in the opposite corner of the room, took down his hat and coat and started to leave the building. He didn't want anyone else to make any more of those embarrassing enquiries; he felt he would choke if they did. What he longed for more than anything else in the world at that moment was to be left alone.

But on the stairs he met Cecil Pankhurst, and Pankhurst's first words made him change his whole mental outlook.

"What are you doing, boy?" enquired the other reporter; "I've got an evening off—what about making a night of it? It seems to me that the *Banner* acceptance ought to be worth a celebration. What do you say?"

Although they had so many differences, Tom now felt drawn to the speaker. Pankhurst was a slug, it was true; but at any rate, he had proved himself a good sportsman that morning.

"All right—we will," Tom replied impulsively; "it's not often that I feel like getting tight, but I do to-night. I'll go and see old Simcox and try to raise some money. Wait here, old man."

"No, I'll come with you," said Pankhurst, and the two, walking out of the publishing office, turned to the right and went in through the swing doors leading to the Advertisement Department.

Simcox, as it happened, was just about to leave the office when he caught sight of Farrar's eager face. He came up to the front counter immediately.

"How much is it this time, Tom?" he said with a smile.

By way of reply, Tom took the letter from the *Daily Banner* from his pocket.

"I want to borrow a quid on this, old man," he replied.

Simcox straightened his reading-glasses, and bent over the paper.

"My word!" he declared admiringly; "ten guineas, is it? All the same, I don't know that I can lend you a pound. Tom—there's a lot of money."

appeared to be taking an impish delight in slipping from beneath their feet, and secondly because they saw fit to stop every so often and declare in loud but incoherent terms what they were determined to do when they reached the top.

Eventually they arrived at the passage leading to the editorial rooms of the *Tribune*, and here, outside the door which never would stay shut, they solemnly shook hands. At that moment, whether the cause was the cooling of his fevered brow by the air which swept in through a broken window, or whether a native caution overrode the effects of the whisky, the fact must be put on record that Pankhurst suddenly and unexpectedly declared his intention of returning the way he had come.

Tom stared at him.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded, leaning on the other's shoulder for support; "first you say you're comin' in wi' me to tell that old squirt, Wilberforce, off; then you....." He stopped to point. "You goin' down all those stairs? It can't be done; they're wobblin' about all over the place."

"I'm goin' home!" replied Pankhurst; and then: "You'd better come, too!"

This heretical advice was greeted with the scorn it deserved.

"You've no guts, Cecil—no guts," came the declaration; and as though scorning to have anything further to do with such a contemptible renegade, Farrar took his right hand off his companion's shoulder.

The result threatened to be catastrophic; but, after doing a *pas seul* of astonishing intricacy, Tom managed to keep upright.

"Goo' night!.....No guts!" Waving his hand in dismissal of the person who had deserted him in this hour of crisis, he thrust himself through the squeaky door, and a minute later the astounded occupants of the *Western Tribune's* sub-editors' room had a shock which was to last them for the rest of their working lives.

Leering at them all with the sublimity of thorough intoxication, Tom Farrar held up his hand.

"Lis'en," he slurred; "you're all here, I s'pose?" he went on as though wishing that everything should be correct and above-board, and he began to count the staring sub-editors off on the fingers of one hand. It proved a lengthy process because he appeared to have some difficulty trying to ascertain the exact

number of fingers he possessed.... Suddenly he became alarmed.

"Where's that old squirt, Wilberforce?" he demanded angrily; "he's not here." And, in order to test thoroughly this statement, he moved across and peered down at the empty chair placed at the head of the long table.

Scriven, one of the junior subs, rose. "He's out at supper, old boy," he said in a sympathetic tone; "come on, now," taking the reporter's arm, "don't be a fool! If he came in and saw you like this, there'd be hell to pay." Farrar shook himself free.

"I've got to see Wilberforce," he declared with the obstinacy of the alcoholically-elated. "I've got to tell him what I think of him—that's what I climbed all those blasted stairs for," he wound up clinchingly.

"Let me put your head under the tap," advised Scriven, keeping his patience.

But before he could attempt to try out this good Samaritan plan, Hiram Wilberforce ambled into the room, the debris of his supper still clinging to his mouse-trap moustache.

He took in the situation at a glance.

"You're drunk, Farrar!" he said, trying to look like the Wrath of God.

The reporter swirled round on him.

"Oh course I'm drunk!" he retorted; "why shouldn't I be drunk? Let me tell you this," he continued before the chief Sub-editor could find any *riposte*, "you're a squirt! And not an ordinary squirt, either; you're a nasty, stinkin', creeping swine! You're the ruination of this paper; you ought to be on the *Plumber's Weekly*. Who told you you were a sub-editor, anyway?" And, picking up a file of copy from the basket to the left of Wilberforce's chair, he hurled it into the hated face of his enemy. That his aim was not very good was beside the point; he had delivered the ultimate insult and now felt that his duty was done.

The face of Hiram Wilberforce, customarily of a decided saffron tint, changed colour; it became green.

Livid with fury, the Senior Sub-editor shook a shaking finger in the direction of the young reporter.

"I'll get you the sack for this, Farrar!" he said vindictively;

"if Mr. Sheepshanks was in his room now I'd go down there straight away. You won't last in this office another day—I'll promise you that!"

"Oh, go to hell!" was the rejoinder; and then, before either of the disputants could indulge in further vituperation, a bleating voice came from the doorway.

"I could hear the disturbance in my own room," complained old Wigmore. The Editor of the *Tribune*, his reading-glasses on the edge of his nose as usual, stared first at Farrar and then at the man he had been vilifying. For once, remembering that after all he was the Editor of the newspaper, he asserted his authority.

"Mr. Wilberforce, what is the explanation of this?" he demanded sternly.

The Chief Sub-editor swung round on him.

"It is easily explained, Mr. Wigmore," he said in a shaking voice; "this young blackguard here—who, as you can see for yourself, is in a state of intoxication—came into the room a few minutes ago and started using the most disgraceful language. He even threatened——"

Wigmore plucked with a thin, yellow hand at his straggly beard.

"Is this true, Mr. Farrar?" he enquired.

"I'm afraid it is—at least partly, sir," the reporter answered. During the short space of time that had elapsed between the arrival of the Editor and the present moment, he had become partially sobered. Wigmore, for all his old-maidish ways, was one of the few men on the editorial floor of the *Tribune* for whom he had any respect; and he felt grieved and ashamed that he should have been brought into the affair. Quite suddenly he realized what a fool he had been.

"I think that much the wisest thing for you to do, Mr. Farrar, is to go home and get some sleep. I will myself go into this matter with Mr. Wilberforce to-morrow."

"Thank you, sir."

Tom started to walk to the door. Much of the bellicosity which had previously possessed him had disappeared before the tired and disappointed look he had seen in the Editor's eyes. Before he could pass out into the corridor, however, the telephone in the reporters' Room, which he had been able to see was started—Manson, whose late night it was, was probably out of his mind, his usual preoccupation rang loudly. It was through the force of habit that he turned aside, crossed the few feet of space, went into the room, took off the receiver and said monotonically:

"Tribune office. Who is it?"

What he heard completed the process of sobering him. He hurried across to the Sub-editors' Room and said in a voice that bore no trace of intoxication:

"That was Hickson out at Kingsby. There's been a terrible fiery disaster at the Three Mile pits—Hickson says he thinks it's one of the worst things that's ever happened."

The words galvanized everyone in the room, but again it was Wigmore who took charge.

"We shall have to rush every reporter we can out there at once," he told Wilberforce. "Young man," turning to Farrar, and speaking sternly, "are you in a fit state to go yourself, do you think?"

The reporter did not reply. At least, not in words. Snatching up a bunch of copy-paper from the nearest desk, he nodded to his Editor and rushed away.

"A very remarkable young man that," declared Wigmore; "think if I were you, Wilberforce, I would allow this matter to rest."

"I refuse to do any such thing!" was the indignant reply; "to-morrow, Mr. Sheepshanks comes in to-morrow, I will make a point of telling him the full circumstances of the disgraceful accident to-night."

"As you please," was the coldly-uttered retort; "I myself will go to see Mr. Sheepshanks to-morrow afternoon....."

And with that, the usual meek-minded Editor, who had so

surprisingly vindicated his position that night, started to walk back to his own room.

IV

Three hours later, a figure that could scarcely be recognized, so covered was it with grime, rushed into that same room. Wigmore, busily engaged in writing the concluding paragraph of a political leader, looked up with mingled surprise and exasperation.

"What——?" he started to say, when a voice which he recognized as belonging to Tom Farrar broke in emphatically.

"I've been below with the rescue party.....it's a grand story.....but I refuse to write it unless you sub. it yourself, or.....won't have that fool Wilberforce mangle this stuff, nor even if I have to resign from the paper.....What's more, I intend to send a carbon copy to the *Banner*. Hickson is their local correspondent, and he has given me permission to do so—we're going to share the lineage."

For a man of seventy to have his thoughts on an intricate political situation disturbed in this startling fashion, was something rather more than Wigmore could stomach; but the thing that saved Farrar, as it had saved him earlier in the evening, was the genuine liking the Editor had for the young reporter. Wigmore had had many talks with William Rideout about Farrar's work, and he had agreed with the *Tribune* Chief Reporter that the youngster ought to have a bright future.

Conquering his temper, he laid down his pen—that same pen with which he had written leading articles for the *Tribune* for upwards of thirty-five years—and turned round in his chair.

"Shut the door," he said first of all; "and now," when this had been done, "sit down and try to tell me calmly exactly what has happened. You say you went down with the rescue party in this colliery disaster to-night?"

The reporter nodded, before breaking into an eager account of how he had persuaded the miners' agent to allow him to accompany the body of miners, who had volunteered to go below at terrible risk, to endeavour to save those comrades who were in desperate need of help through an explosion in one of the more distant workings.

"What about the stuff for the *Banner*?" he asked.

"I took that over to the post office myself," the other said. "most of it is probably in London by now."

It was not until he was thoroughly satisfied on this point, and had thanked the kindly Sub-Editor for the helpful part that he had played, that Tom staggered down the stone steps, called a taxi and was driven home.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE GODS DECIDE

I

MEANWHILE, in that huge and ornately-equipped Fleet Street office which housed the *Daily Banner*, there was considerable excitement. Not that this was an unusual constant in the daily life of the *Banner*, for the latter was a paper which thrived on excitement and was stimulated by its special sensations. But, all the same, there was much self-congratulation in the Editorial Rooms.

For this reason: a big story had "broken", and the *Banner*, with its usual luck, had been supplied with a really first-class description of the appalling colliery disaster, involving the loss of over fifty lives, that had taken place on the outskirts of a provincial town of Burminster that night.

Although he had no scruples about casting a man into outer darkness once he considered he had served his purpose, the Editor-in-Chief of London's most spectacular morning paper was always on the search for fresh talent.

"A newspaper," he once said, "is like a machine that has to be fed continuously with new blood and fresh brains if it is to survive." And, a product himself of the provinces, Alan Bickley, now in the full maturity of his forty years, preferred to recruit his staff from the country newspapers instead of the rival Fleet Street offices. However raw and uncouth a recruit might be on arrival, "A. B." (as he was known) was

attempted to lull the storm that had arisen the night before: it was also the guiding motive in the promise he had made to Farrar to go through his "story" of the colliery disaster himself. Now, as he got back to the bed and spread the *Daily Banner* out before him, he thrilled with a special kind of excitement as he saw that his own judgment had been more than confirmed by London's most sensational sheet.

Of course the *Banner* had dealt with the story in its own particular way—but here was vindication for Farrar with a vengeance! Why, they had even put his name to the stuff! That was not exactly ethical, in his opinion, because, after all, the young man wasn't a member of their staff, as they had led the public to believe—but, there, so many unorthodox things happened in modern Fleet Street journalism that he did not suppose the point was worth raising.

Sufficient for him were the dual facts (a) that his own judgment concerning Tom Farrar's efficiency had been substantiated in another quarter, and (b) that a resounding victory had been scored over Hiram Wilberforce.

The third "on the list" was Wilberforce himself. His mean and petty nature had caused him to overflow with bile the night before. He had tried to get some satisfaction by fiercely upbraiding the junior Sub-editor, Scriven, upon learning that the latter had taken a carbon copy of Farrar's colliery-disaster story across to the General Post Office, there to be telegraphed to the *Daily Banner* in Fleet Street; but this had been a hollow triumph because it was evident from the attitude of the rest of the Sub-editors' Room that it was considered in the circumstances a particularly paltry action.

Scriven himself, when taxed, had said he was perfectly prepared to "go on the carpet" in front of Mr. Sheepshanks if he (Wilberforce) decided to report him.

"In any case, I don't care a damn," unexpectedly went on the Sub-editor, "I've had an offer to go across to the *Bugle* at five-bob a week more—and, in all probability, I shall accept."

It had been a bitter moment for Wilberforce, listening to this challenge, and being conscious of the censorious eyes of the men with whom he worked; but he felt he had his duty to do, and so before leaving for home, he had written a note and addressed it

to the junior proprietor of the paper. He was confident Adrian Sheepshanks would support him in this controversy.

But, meanwhile, like thousands of other persons in the City of Westminster that morning, he was holding a copy of the *Daily Banner* before him as he lay in bed and was reading with furrowed brow and a sneer on his lips the Fleet Street version of Tom Farrar's story. If he had been honest with himself—of the occurrence with Hiram Wilberforce—he would have said that the appearance of the *Tribune* reporter's story on the front page of this London newspaper was truly remarkable; although he rebuked Scriven for "wasting Mr. Sheepshanks's time" by passing it over to the General Post Office the night before, he had said the words "The *Banner* will use an agency report; they want to be bothered with Farrar's ridiculous nonsense!"

Now, as he realized that he would have to eat his words, he felt a wave of venomous hatred against the young reporter wash through him. And this hostility was directed not only at Farrar; he felt all the antipathy that he had harboured against Wigmore for so many years rise up in a great flood.

But within a few hours he would be at the office—he would make a point of going down to the *Tribune* immediately after lunch—that was, if he could control himself sufficiently in the while—and then Sheepshanks himself should decide.

In any case, he was going to stick to his resolution of the night before to report Farrar first for drunkenness and secondly for gross insubordination.

The final person on this short list of persons who matter to me read Tom Farrar's story in the *Daily Banner* was Maud Lamer. She was not interested in colliery disasters as such, when they happened locally or in any other part of the world, but when she sat in the corner of the jolting tramcar on her way to school that morning, she felt a sudden contraction of the heart. This was caused by the sight of Tom Farrar's name in print.

She gave the matter her close attention.

"By Tom Farrar, *Daily Banner* Special Correspondent. What could it mean? Had he got a job on his favourite newspaper? Was this an immediate result of the news he had sent her twenty-four hours before? Had the *Banner* people been taken by the article he had sent them that they had offered him

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"By Tom Farrar, *Daily Banner* Special Correspondent." What could it mean? Had he got a job on his favourite newspaper? Was this an immediate result of the news he had told her twenty-four hours before? Had the *Banner* people been so taken by the article he had sent them that they had offered him

cences of a famous author.
The tale went like this: Two men were discussing religion

in a West End club.
"How do you think Christ would get on if He came back to earth now?" asked the first man.

His companion pondered for several moments.
"Oh, He'd get on all right—provided, of course, He kept away from His fellow-creatures!"

Human nature! What a foul thing it was—tainting the very air one breathed! Young and inexperienced as he was, Tom felt this conviction so strongly that he wanted to rush out of the room.

The tension was broken by the Chief Reporter.
"There's a note for you in the box, Tom," he said.

"Mechanically he replied:
"Thank you."

He moved listlessly across the room, the men whose faces were transformed as they drew a mask over their private thoughts, breaking up once again into little groups.

Yes, there was a note, but the handwriting was strange. He did not recognize it. It couldn't be of any importance, in a case, so he slipped it unconcernedly into his pocket.

He was about to turn away in order to look at the Diary that morning—when a ginger-head protruded itself like an obscene grimace through the doorway.

"Mr. Sheepshanks would like to see you in his private cranium."
"Mr. Farrar," remarked the owner of this objectionably-co-

"WHAT!" demanded the reporter.
It was not because he had failed to hear the word matter of fact, although they had been uttered in a whisper, he had heard them very distinctly—that he bore the ejaculation. No: the reason he had turned on them in what might have appeared to the casual onlooker unprovoked fury, was because the youth who had said such a nauseating, repellent effect upon him that the other physical presence was an affront to his senses. Why passed the lad Perkins on the stairs, he felt as though of slugs were crawling over his naked body.

Perkins was the nearest approach to Dickens's Uriah Heep that he had yet come across in real life; that was why if he had not known him, he might have decided that Uriah Heep was a grotesque exaggeration.

But not after knowing Perkins. Although this youth of twenty dressed neatly and was apparently paid a fair enough salary, yet he had many of the true and typical Heepian qualities. For instance, he fawned upon those above, but exercised petty tyrannies upon the few who were beneath him.

It did not add to his popularity that he fulfilled the post of being the younger Sheepshanks's jackal. As the whole office knew Sheepshanks to be a masterly hypocrite himself, it was not surprising that this acolyte of his should fashion himself after his master's mould. Many of the stories told about Perkins in the *Tribune* office were no doubt apocryphal—his enemies, of whom he had a great number, delighted in spreading fresh yarns about the youth—but it had been more or less established that his sexual habits were certainly peculiar. Sheepshanks himself had long been suspect in this direction.....

Feeling now that the fellow was choking the very air he was breathing, Tom waited, anger in his eyes, for the answer to his challenge.

Perkins turned the other cheek.

"I'm sorry if you didn't hear me the first time, Mr. Farrar," he said in the mellifluous voice that was as irritating to the listener as a kick in the pants; "Mr. Sheepshanks—Mr. Adrian Sheepshanks—would like to see you in his private room."

"What about?"

Tom did not like the sound of this at all; there was something subtly Sheepshankian in the words.

The acolyte simpered.

"I'm very sorry, but I'm afraid I don't know anything about it; of course, I am only Mr. Sheepshanks's secretary."

Resisting the temptation to tell him what he thought he really was, Farrar turned back and said to Rideout, who had been following the conversation with some interest: "I have to go down to see Mr. Sheepshanks, Mr. Rideout."

The Chief Reporter walked over and put a hand on his shoulder.

"He'll probably give me the sack," was the reply.

Sheepshanks blinked again. Anything but a fool, he knew that the encounter was going against him; he felt that the young man whom he had intended to chastise with whips and with scorpions was gaining all the tricks.

"He probably will dismiss you—and if that, indeed, proves to be the case, I can only say that you will thoroughly deserve it." It was the best he could do at the moment, and he hoped it would have some effect.

On the contrary, it made Tom Farrar smile.

"I will save him the trouble, Mr. Sheepshanks; you will please take a month's notice from me. If possible, I should like to leave to-day."

Sheepshanks shrank back as though he had been struck a second blow. He had never been spoken to like this before by a member of the *Tribune* staff. A fundamental humbug, he had tried to convince himself of the truth of what he always told other people—namely, that any journalist could consider himself fortunate if he worked for the *Tribune*. He never stopped to consider the many cases of genuine distress that existed amongst the reportorial and sub-editorial staffs. And even if he had done so, he would have put the thought out of his mind. He was that type of man.

Recovering himself, he endeavoured to call dignity to his aid.

"Very well," he said, his sallow face darkening with anger; "you shall leave to-day, Farrar. I will have no one—no one, you understand—on my uncle's staff who adopts the attitude you have shown to me. I was prepared to be lenient, to make excuses for the follies of youth, but your manner has forced me to change my mind. I have nothing more to say to you; you can go."

Swirling round on his grotesquely bowed legs, he signified that the interview was at an end.

Ignoring a stifled gasp from the youth Perkins, who had seen his high god toppled from its perch, Tom walked out of the room. He held his head high. He was burning with what he considered was righteous and thoroughly justified indignation. He was glad to escape; glad to get out of that sickening atmosphere which threatened to stifle him. He felt he had done the right thing. He knew that what Wigmore had told him the night before was

VI

Cecil Pankhurst was not to be denied. Tom, his old sparring partner (as he put it), was the man of the hour; and he, who had always believed in Farrar, and who had always stood up for him, felt a privileged person.

"Come on out and have a drink, boy," he urged, putting his hand through the other's arm; "I'm supposed to be getting an interview out of the Lord Mayor, but he can go to hell. He's so keen on having his blasted name even in a rag like ours that he'll see me any time.....come on; let's have a drink. I want to hear everything that happened this morning."

It was the big moment in Tom's life. He would have been an unimaginative clod if he had not felt the drama of the situation: the rest of the reporters, some of whom were old enough to be his father, staring at him as though he were a visiting celebrity from Fleet Street and not a youth who had worked with them side by side for the past five years. Unconsciously, he adopted a little swagger as he walked towards the door.

Before they could reach the corridor outside, they were stopped by the pot-bellied, asthmatical Naylor, the shabbily-dressed office commissionaire. Naylor was carrying a number of letters in his pudgy hand.

"Second post," he grunted belligerently—Naylor, for no doubt very good reasons, always adopted a fighting attitude towards the rest of mankind. But he softened as he saw Farrar.

"There's one for you, Tom," he went on, picking out an envelope from the pile, "from the *Daily Banner*, I see," he added, actually giving his favourite reporter a grin.

Feeling that he could not stand any more self-aggrandizement—at least, not with his former colleagues still staring at him—Tom pushed the letter almost shamefacedly into his coat-pocket, and rejoined Pankhurst who was impatiently waiting for him at the foot of the stairs.

VII

The two did not go to the Cave ("that bitch Ruby makes me sick!" exclaimed Pankhurst), but instead, as though this was a day for throwing aside all customary rules and regulations, they stepped boldly into the Old Inn, a hostelry which, b.

was visible from the managerial windows of the *Tribune*, was always recognized as being out of bounds.

"But what do you care for Sheepshanks now?" enquired Pankhurst as they walked across the forbidden threshold; "I wish to God I could get the chance to tell the swine off!"

It was not until Tom had finished a short but vivid description of the interview with the junior proprietor of the *Tribune* that Pankhurst branched off into a fresh line of talk.

"That was a grand story of yours, Tom, last night—and didn't the *Banner* do you proud! I shouldn't be a bit surprised if they don't offer you a job—you haven't read that letter yet," he went on to remind his companion.

Having his memory jogged in this manner, Tom pulled the envelope out of his pocket. His fingers trembled as he tore the paper and smoothed out the sheet of artistically embossed note-paper that was within.

"Read it out," pressed Pankhurst.

Tom read—in a shaking voice:

Dear Mr. Farrar,—

As a result of the story of the local colliery disaster you have sent us to-night, I am willing to offer you an immediate post with this newspaper, should you care to accept it.

I believe, after having read your story myself, that you are the type of reporter who would permanently make good on the *Banner*; and I am prepared to offer you a three months' trial at a starting salary of 12 guineas per week.

Will you kindly let me have an immediate reply to this, and oblige.

Yours very truly,

Alan Bickersdyke

(Editor-in-Chief).

"What did I tell you!" cried Pankhurst, the tone of his voice reflecting the struggle that he was having between triumph and jealousy. "You'll accept, of course?" he went on.

"Yes—I shall accept. What else can I do?" replied Farrar. "I'm out of a job, remember."

"Out of a job!" repeated the other reporter; "you don't call working for the *Tribune* a job, do you? Out of a job! Twelve guineas a week as a start and another ten guineas to spend on

beer when you get up there! God Almighty, what're you talking about?...I expect sending them that leader-page article helped, you know," he wound up.

"It may have done," said Tom indifferently. For the moment he had forgotten all about his earlier success; thought of that had been swept away by the more spectacular triumph of the night before.

"When will you be going?" now asked Pankhurst.

"As soon as I can fix things up at home."

"Well, the best of luck, old son—and see what you can do for me once you get up there, will you?"

"Of course I will." He couldn't see Cecil in Fleet Street somehow, but he felt he had to give the promise.

VIII

After Pankhurst had departed to fulfil his interview engagement with the Lord Mayor of Burminster, Tom sat on with another drink. Pankhurst's praise had been gratifying enough, but now he wanted to be alone. He had to try to sort out his racing, tumultuous thoughts in silence.

He realized, of course, that the whole course of his life had been changed by this decision of the gods. From being a provincial nonentity, he had become another, if very minor, Byron. He had achieved something approaching Fame overnight.

The one discordant note, he felt, would be struck by his mother. The latter would weep. His father would be secretly glad.

But his mother would have to become reconciled to his going away; she had always known that his ambition was to get on, and that to achieve any kind of progress at the *Tribune* office was an impossibility.

Once again, he took the *Banner* letter from his pocket and re-read the dazzling words. Yes, it was true enough; there was no fake about this. Twelve guineas a week to start...and the prospect of making permanently good, as the writer had put it. Yes, he'd do that all right; he felt it in his bones; he'd work night and day to justify the confidence which this great newspaper had in him.

It was when he replaced the letter in his pocket that his fingers felt another envelope. Wondering what it could be, he

pulled it out, and then remembered that this was the note which he had taken from the box in the Reporters' Room when he made his first appearance there that morning.

Speculating uninterestedly as to the contents—it was probably a note from some fool of a woman about a local charity show in which she hoped to get him interested—he opened the envelope.

This is what he read :

My Darling Tom,—

How proud I am of you ! When I read your article in the Daily Banner this morning, I felt I wanted to hug you—and if only you had been available, I would have done it, too !

Forgive me, my dear, for behaving so abominably yesterday morning. I know it's no excuse, but I had been terribly worried by an upset (my dreadful family again !) before I left home, and my nerves were thoroughly on edge. Please forgive me ! I have had some awful hours since. If you could only have been with me last night, you would have felt almost as sorry for me as I was for myself.

I want to see you to apologize properly. This note is merely an attempt to relieve the pain that I am feeling now. Please do ring me up directly you get this, if only to tell me that everything is once again all right between us.

Your

Maud.

P. S.—If I had had any doubt before about being in love with you, this stupid little quarrel has finally decided me. I am in love with you ! There ! !

M.

Tom felt stunned. In the rush of circumstances he had almost forgotten about the girl whose letter he held in his hand. But his reaction was swift and overwhelming : now everything else had to take a back seat ; he felt that nothing in the world mattered so much as seeing Maud Latimer again.

He did not stop to reflect. He lost no time in considering what might be at the back of those honeyed words ; he only knew that a greater excitement than even anything he had known during the past few tumultuous hours was gripping him now.

Feeling that his whole being was on fire, he got up and rushed away. Within two minutes, he was at the General Post Office dialling the number of the cheap dress-shop.....

IX

"Darling, you must come in to-night—if you don't, you'll break my heart!"

Those lovely lips, which he had been kissing so frequently during the past few hours, and the very touch of which set his brain aflame, were pressed close to his again.

"Oh, Tom, I can't bear the thought of you leaving me. I do want you so!"

She waited breathlessly for his answer. He should not escape this second time; that she had sworn. The world was standing on end for her that night. The news the young reporter had given her that he would be leaving Burminster very soon—certainly within a few days—had roused within her a feeling of baffled ferocity. His talk of marriage, of their becoming engaged—all this had left her comparatively bored. That was with the future; what she wanted was the present.

Whilst she waited for the answer to her appeal, Maud Latimer felt herself being cheated. She could see the domination which she had worked so hard to exert over this good-looking boy—a domination which was entirely ruthless—slipping away; she told herself that unless she was careful, Tom would escape her a second time—escape before he could fulfil the purpose which she had determined he should fulfil. After this intense physical craving, which had sprung up so suddenly and so surprisingly, had been satisfied—the desire to know him sexually... well, the future could take care of itself. She didn't care a damn about what happened afterwards.

She had schemed deliberately for this moment; from the instant Tom had met her outside the dress-shop at five minutes past six that night—how she had rushed with her changing!—she had set herself first to enthrall and then to keep him captive.

It had not been difficult; he had responded generously and without question. When she had started to refer to their quarrel, he had brushed the subject aside.

"That was all a mistake, darl
It won't occur again."

She could have smiled had not her thoughts been concentrated in an entirely different channel. As it was, she resolved to make sure of what she felt certain was already a half-won victory.

"We've got to celebrate to-night, darling," she replied; "I feel so happy at seeing you again that I scarcely know what to do with myself. But we'll go to Nicola's.....I've got plenty of money—do let me pay!"

"Not on your life!" he rejoined laughingly, as he hailed a taxi-cab.

The meal, simple as it was, at the well-known park-side restaurant, seemed to establish a new camaraderie between them. At least, that was Tom's impression. He could still scarcely believe that it was his good fortune to be seated opposite this radiant girl, whose mind, he now told himself, was as beautiful as her body. And what a good sport she was after all! In the excitement of the reunion, he forgot entirely the bitter memory of sixty-six hours earlier. It was enough for him, in his enraptured state, to be told that her ill-humour had been due entirely to a domestic *fracas* before she set out for business the previous morning.

They were together again! That was enough for him. And not only were they re-united, but the quarrel, if such it could be called, had linked them far more closely than they had been before. Maud had unbelievably told him that she loved him—that it was everything in life to her! She had done this spontaneously, and of her own free will; he had not pressed her for such a confession, although it had thrilled him inexpressibly to hear it.

They stood on the pavement outside the restaurant for a moment or so. Maud was the first to speak.

"If you only had a room, or a flat, Tom!" she whispered, pressing his arm; "as it is, we shall have to go on the Common: want to get you away from everybody else: to have you all to yourself to-night!"

Who could have resisted such sweet flattery? Certainly not boy in Tom Farrar's present condition of mind. He had thrilled to the words; he might have been an instrument upon which a practised musician was playing skilfully.

"We'll take a taxi," he said.

X

That had been two and a half hours before. Time had flown. They had walked and talked; kissed and embraced; sworn eternal devotion; made their plans for the future: Tom was to send for her directly he felt his position with the *Daily Banner* was sufficiently secure to justify such optimism. In the meanwhile they were to consider themselves engaged.

For most of this time Maud had been secretly amused. She still regarded any thought of marriage with this young man as belonging to the realm of impossible romance. A realist to her finger-tips, she knew that twelve guineas a week was a good enough salary when viewed from Burminster standards—but how far would it go in London? It would mean living either in a small suburban house, surrounded by common neighbours, or in a tiny West Central flat. She and Tom would have to look at every penny. Worse, if children came, it would mean positive penury.

And she hated children! She had always hated them! Why the very thought of her body becoming misshapen and distorted through the process of motherhood was infuriating.

Marriage was only to be considered at all when the man was rich; she had long since made up her mind about that. The many of the sordid qualities which seemed inseparable from matrimony could be softened, even if they could not be altogether avoided. Of course, Tom might himself be rich one day, but that was much too long a chance for her to take. She wouldn't even begin to consider it.

Consequently, although she played up to her companion's romantic reading of the future, she did so because she was animated by two purposes. The first of these was because each fresh day-dream was accompanied by an embrace, whilst the second was due to her set plan to seduce the dreamer before she parted from him that night.

And now, shaking with mingled desire (which during the journey home had become an obsession with her) and fear that her purpose would after all be thwarted, she waited breathlessly for Tom Farrar's answer.

He said exactly what she
him for saying it!

"But, darling, your people? It's so late....."

She forced back the scathing words that rose to her tongue, and instead, drew his head down to her breast.

"Do you think I should ask if it wasn't quite all right? Mother and Father and the two kids will be in bed, and Herbert is staying the night with a friend. Oh, darling, aren't you fond of me?"

His head in a whirl, Tom found himself being led by the hand towards the front-door. Before he was fully aware of what had happened, he was in the large semi-basement room that served as a lounge-cum-dining-room in the Latimer household.

"Sit down, darling, and *do* make yourself at home!"

Maud, as though wishing to set him an example, took off her hat and coat and flung them over the back of a chair.

"Thank goodness, the fire hasn't gone out; I'll soon put it right." And, stooping, she picked up the broken tongs and added two lumps of coal—both large ones—on the already cheerful fire.

That done, she turned back to Farrar who had taken the first available chair.

"Tom, how dreadful you look perched up on that chair! Why, you might almost be in church!" she exclaimed. "Sit with me on sofa. It hasn't got any springs left, poor thing, but it's still quite comfy.....Come and try it."

She must have been unconscious of it, Tom told himself, but her gesture of invitation, she had somehow disarranged herself. It was now drawn up on one side so that her left leg to the middle of the thigh was exposed. Tom was able to see the line of white flesh between the top of the stocking and what he imagined must be the edge of her knickers. It made him uncomfortable.

He felt ashamed for looking: Maud was far too decent a girl. It seemed to him as though he were committing an unforgivable sacrilege.

She caught his eye as he started to turn away.

"Oh, sorry," she said, as though able to read his thoughts; "I don't know....." Hanging her head, she began to pull down her skirt. Then, suddenly, she exclaimed defiantly: "But what does it matter? You'll have to see me—all of me—one day."

Although he knew that she had made the remark in all inno-

cence, Tom felt freshly uncomfortable. He had set this girl apart; she was different from all others. Even the contemplation of an attempt to seduce her was horrible.....unthinkable. He ought to go; he realized that. And yet if he said anything he sensed there would be a "scene." Maud was strung-up; her emotions were overcharged. Which was all the more reason why he should guard himself. She wanted protecting—poor kid!

He tried to pass off the dangerous incident with a jest.

"I promise to pay full attention to any strip-tease act.....once we're married. Then it will be marvellous."

She laughed—and, infatuated as he was, the merriment sounded somehow forced, almost stident

"Tom, how priggish! Why, I really believe you're afraid of me!"

His voice was unsteady as he said: "It's myself I'm afraid of, Maud....."

"Silly boy! As though I couldn't trust you!" She jumped up. "Darling!" she whispered as her arms went round his neck and her mouth was pressed so fiercely to his that her teeth cut into his lips, "why are you ashamed just because we love each other so madly?"

"I'm not ashamed," he replied; "I'm proud."

"Oh, darling," she sighed.

She pressed so closely against him that he could feel the surging of her breasts. Her whole body was quivering.

"Even if it were wrong, I shouldn't care: I love you so!" she whispered; "look at me!"

Her eyes were dark and heavy with passion; her lips were moist. She disengaged his left hand from her waist and placed it on the entrancing curve of her buttocks. Beneath the thin fabric of her dress, the touch of the smooth flesh made

"Love me!" she pleaded huskily.

"Oh, darling, I can't!" But already the call of the b beating down his scruples; the tyranny of the flesh over his former resolve.

"I love you for being so shy," she told him, and, away, ran across the room. There was a click, and descended upon the room. The or light now came fire—and that seemed to sink encor

"No!" said a voice within Farrar; "NO! NO!" Even when the blood and the flesh were clamouring so for satisfaction, his better self rose uppermost. "I must go, darling," he said weakly; "please don't leave me; you're too lovely."

She laughed. And it was the laugh of a woman who has won her course and saw victory in sight. "You don't know yet how lovely I really am, you won't say so!" she said. Again she pressed her body so close to his that at he felt himself becoming dizzy. What remained of his resolution vanished when she took his hands and placed them on her breasts.

"They hurt so," she whispered; "they want your hands. The fool! To think he was going to get away! In the darkness mercifully hiding the smile which these provoked, she forced him back to the sofa.

"I feel stifled in this dress," she said. He made no attempt to stop her, even if he turned away for that was gone. He was powerless: even, if he had been convinced that death would follow Maud's rapid movements, he could not have protested. Destiny had him in its keeping.

A low ripple of laughter made him look up before him. She was naked except for her stockings.

"Now you can really decide if I am lovely, darling," she said, pirouetting slowly. Then she sank into his arms.

"I want you terribly, Tom!" were the last words he coherently remembered; "love me!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE DOOR IS SHUT

REPORT here as quickly as possible.—“DAILY BANNER.”

So the first telegram had read. It meant that there was no time to lose, and, after returning from the office where he had said good-bye to those he considered his friends, Tom had returned home to pack.

He had broken the news of his impending departure the previous evening. The reactions of his father, mother, and sister had been very much as he had anticipated. His father, after murmuring a perfunctory “Well, I wish you good luck, my boy,” had appeared to take no further interest in the matter, lapsing into his customary mood of whining discord with Life. But Tom was not deceived; he sensed a feeling of deep satisfaction on the part of his male parent: Joshua Farrar would no longer have the grievance of his presence in the house; he would be able to claim the undivided attention henceforth of his wife if not of his daughter. It was a burden lifted.

But his mother took up a very different attitude. Although she had dreaded this day, which in her heart she had known was inevitable sooner or later, the thought of losing her son so quickly caused her to break into an uncontrollable fit of weeping. In spite of her poor imagination, she was able to visualize what the home would be without Tom’s bright presence—just a depressing, melancholy shell.

“Must you go, Tom?” she asked when, with his own handkerchief, he had dried her eyes.

“I’m afraid so, Mother! It’s such a wonderful chance! I want you to be proud of me one day—and there’s no chance of that happening so long as I stay on the *Tribune*. Think of it!” he went on, “twelve guineas a week to start—and all sorts of possibilities ahead!”

His sister Agnes, who had been her most belligerent sniffs. Rebell

an entirely different way from her father, she cast a typical envenomed shaft.

"Mind you take care of yourself, Tom," she adjured; "there's plenty of opportunity for a boy like you to go wrong in London. And you're such a fool, anything is likely to happen!"

Tom dug her in the ribs.

"Shut up, Cassandra!" he replied, feeling sorry that she would make no effort to cultivate the brain that he knew she possessed.

"Who are you calling names?" she rejoined quickly.

Feeling that it would be a waste of time to explain, he turned again to Mrs. Farrar.

"I can get down from London in less than a couple of hours. Mother; if ever you want me, you've only got to send me a wire."

"It's a wonderful opportunity; I must say that," put in his father in such a querulous tone that he might have been demanding of the Almighty why He had seen fit to bestow such a favour upon his son; "and we mustn't put any obstacle in his way, you know, my dear."

Mary Farrar forced back the lump in her throat.

"No, I suppose not," she replied, "but it does seem hard that I should lose my boy." She might have added: "He's all I've really got," but recovered herself in time.

Tom put an arm round her neck, and kissed her on the cheek.

"Cheer up, Mother! I know you'll miss me—but, as I told you just now, you've only got to send me a wire, and I'll be down by the next train! And who knows?—perhaps one day you'll come up to London and live yourself. Then we can be with each other again!"

"I shouldn't count on that," was the sister's acrid comment. "there's enough work to do in this house, let alone slaving myself to death in dirty London!"

Her brother laughed.

"Perhaps you'll be married by that time, Aggie," he proffered.

She flushed, and Tom knew that he had struck her a vital blow. He was sorry.

"Catch me being the slave of any man!" Agnes declared; "I've seen too much of that already," with a baleful look at her father.

Mrs. Farrar immediately bridled.

"That's enough of that, Agnes," she said in a tone of stern reproof; "you ought to show more respect for your father!"

Her daughter immediately replied to the reproof.

"Who said anything about Father?" she challenged.

"We won't have any more discussions on the point," Mrs. Farrar summed up; "I hope you'll be able to spend your last evening at home, Tom?" she went on, turning to her son.

Tom hesitated. He wished to make it up to his mother in every possible way during the short time that remained, but—

Whilst he was trying to find the necessary words, his sister broke in.

"That would be too much to expect; he has to see that girl of his, I haven't any doubt!"

"I was hoping that you would bring Miss Latimer home to see us," remarked his mother in a voice which she tried hard to keep from being unsteady. These two blows, in combination, were prostrating.

"I will if you would really like me to, Mother," he said. He could not see Maud at ease in this atmosphere, but he felt he owed his mother the promise.

"I think we should see her, Father; don't you?"

Joshua Farrar moved uneasily in his chair. He always disliked having to meet "company," more especially at short notice. He gave his wife a look of bilious hostility.

"I shall be very pleased to meet your young lady, if you bring her here, Tom," he said, presenting a picture of miserable and extreme self-abnegation.

Tom rallied himself with an effort.

"All right! If Maud can get away, I'll bring her home to-night sometime, if it's only for half an hour."

Then he jumped up. He was anxious to get away. For one thing, he wanted to see the Rev. William Burnside to say good-bye, and for another he was desperately anxious to be with Maud again. The time now was so horribly short—he had arranged to catch the noon fast train to London the next at the *Daily Banner* office for duty at half-time, but he must be prepared to work at supposed.

"Well, I must get away," he said; "d about Maud, Mother—it's not necessary."

Agnes regarded this remark as being aimed

"She'll have to take us as she finds us;

about after any girl." And as though her feelings were rapidly overcoming her, she got up and rushed out of the room.

II

Burnside was waiting for him in the familiar, book-lined study, smelling so strongly of tobacco smoke, when he called. He held out both hands to the young reporter, and exclaimed in his hearty, booming voice, that always rang with sincerity: "Well, Tom, it's happened!....I always told you it would, now didn't I? The best of luck, my boy; I know that, given the chance, you'll never stop climbing now.....That was a grand story of yours about the colliery disaster; I suppose that brought it all about, eh?"

"Yes—I suppose it did."

With this modest rejoinder, Tom sat down and accepted the pewter tobacco jar which the clergyman passed over.

"I'm off to-morrow morning, sir," he stated; "but I couldn't go before I had wished you 'good-bye.' It wouldn't have been right."

Burnside beamed.

"That was just like you, Tom," he answered; "and I should have thought that you'd done something to be ashamed of if you'd forgotten me—let me tell you that!"

Tom felt himself flushing. The memory of what had happened the night before was still very vivid in his mind. He had been a cad—the worst kind of cad, and it would take a very long time for him to regain his complete self-respect. He felt he wanted to tell Burnside all that had happened, but his courage failed him. Oh, he knew that the circumstances were exceptional; he knew that Maud—incredible as it now seemed in retrospect—had expected him to behave in exactly the way he had done; but the bad taste was still in his mouth; and he couldn't wash it out.

His misgivings on the point were strengthened by Burnside's next remark.

"I've never done any preaching to you yet, Tom, now have I?" he started, leaning back in his chair, his blackened briar (an old favourite) clenched tightly between his strong teeth.

"No—that's one of the many things I've liked about you," the reporter replied frankly.

"Well, I'm going to do a little preaching now—no, not

preaching; that's the wrong word. Suppose I substitute 'good advice'; that won't sound so alarming, will it?"

"I'm willing to listen to anything you want to tell me," Tom said resolutely.

"I hoped you'd say that. Now there's something on my mind, Tom. And I'm the type of man who, when he's got something on his mind, cannot rest until he gets it off. Perhaps I'm too honest for a good many people; I'm afraid so; I've made many enemies through that. Still," flinging his head back defiantly, "that's the way I am; that's the way I shall always be; that's the way, if I am to be deady honest, I'm glad God made me. It's the way I should want to be if I had my own fashioning all over again."

This was man's talk; something that Tom could understand. He warmed to the clergyman as he had done so many times in the past.

"Shoot—padre!"

Burnside smiled. It was that likeable smile of his which lit up his face as though by an inner flame. The man looked radiant.

"All right! Now let's look this present situation straight in the face, my boy. You're a young man—going in twenty-four, aren't you? And you're off to London for the first time from a provincial city. Does that fact convey anything to you?"

Tom, who knew the other man, took his pipe out of his mouth and waved it in the other's direction.

"Carry on," he enjoined; "that's merely the opening paragraph."

"Yes, it is," was the retort. "To you this change conjure up an almost endless wealth, I suppose, of possibilities. Well that's all right so far as it goes. But I'm looking at it from another angle. You see, Tom," his voice softening, "I'm not only very fond of you, but I'm very proud of you. Proud to call you my friend. And being proud of you," the speaker hurried on before the boy could have any chance of saying anything himself, "don't want to be worried about you in the future.....No, just on listening," as a clouded expression could be seen in the young man's face. "You're young, temperamental, and more than passing good-looking—let's look facts straight in the face, as I told you before—and very attractive to women, I haven't 21

loaded against them from the beginning—and the handicap is greater every year they live. Don't ask me why God willed it so, because I can't tell you; it's one of the mysteries of life we shall never be able to probe. And don't ask me either a loving and all-merciful God allows such dreadful disease syphilis to exist so that tens of thousands of decent young fellows are ruined every year. That's another of the mysteries.

"Perhaps there's a purpose in it all; I don't pretend to know, or even to guess at the truth; but now I've had this with you, Tom, I want you to promise me that, so far as humanly possible, you won't let ten minutes' blind folly positively ruin all your future chances. It isn't worth it, my boy, to take it from me, it isn't worth it. As I told you just now, I had to fight this thing myself all my life; why, when I was a youngster in that Welsh village where I was brought up —

Burnside broke off, but the gesture he made was eloquent enough.

"Sex is a grimly ironical business," he continued after a pause; "we're born with certain desires. Those desires, if properly controlled, must work for our good—at least so we are informed. But what's the youngster to do if he can't get married? If he fights the devil, he often becomes a case for a doctor or, even, a nerve-sanatorium; if he yields, he risks disaster.....Throw yourself into your work, Tom, as I have done; that, and plenty of exercise, if you can get it, are the best palliatives. But always remember that the harder you work, the more dangerous will be the off-moments that I referred to just now. The best thing a boy like you can do is to get married—once you find the right girl. Is she in the offing, Tom?"

If Burnside had asked that question only twenty-four hours before, Tom would have given him an emphatic affirmative. But now he paused. Once again the desire to tell his friend, this thoroughly dependable man of the world, the whole story about Maud Latimer, returned, but for the second time a feeling of hot shame kept him from doing so.

"I'll tell you when she is," he compromised; and hated himself for the prevarication.

"Well, mind you do," adjured the minister. "And

I AM MAUD LATIMER

before you go—because I'm not going to keep you any longer; you've got a heap of other people to see, no doubt—remember that Raymond Hurlbut will be always glad to see you in Town. I should keep in touch with him if I were you, Tom—who knows, one day you may write a play together!"

"And pigs may fly," scoffed the reporter. "Perhaps they will one day if Science goes on in the way it's doing," was the complacent answer; "in any case, don't forget to look him up. And don't forget, too, to drop me a line now and again; you know that I shall always be glad to hear from

Good luck, my boy, and the very best of everything!"

With a cordial handshake, the two parted.

III

As he got off the tram at the bottom of Ashburton Gardens—quarters of an hour later, Tom had a feeling of fresh business. This disturbing emotion had been with him ever since he had left the Latimer house in the early hours of that morning; his conscience had begun to prick him then, and it had kept on its process.

Maud had arranged to meet him at the top of the road, when he reached the spot she was not in sight. After waiting impatiently for five minutes, consulting his watch every minute or so, he began to feel that something must have happened. Why hadn't Maud kept the appointment? Perhaps she was ill! A ghastly thought! He must find out immediately.

The prospect of meeting Maud's family was not very alluring, especially after the belittling remarks she had made about her nearest relations, but there was nothing else for it: a couple of minutes later he was walking up the well-remembered path.

His knock on the door was answered by a middle-aged woman, who, he felt, must be Maud's father.

"I'm sorry to bother you, but my name's Farrar," he said.

The other held out a hand.

"So you're Mr. Farrar, are you?" the man replied in a friendly fashion; "I'm very pleased to meet you. I'm your father."

The speaker did not look very well groomed—as a fact, he had a decidedly seedy appearance—but his manner

genial, and Tom found himself liking him, almost against his better judgment.

"Come in, won't you?" now said Latimer.

"Thank you. I'd arranged to see Maud at the top of the road, but as she didn't turn up, I got rather anxious. Is she all right?"

By this time they were in the shabby hall, which led down to the living-room. Mr. Latimer bent his head sideways.

"Did anything happen last night?" he whispered.

Tom gave a violent start. Maud surely hadn't said anything?

"Why do you ask?" he parried.

His companion was not the type to whom he felt he could have given an intimate confidence, even if he had not been Maud's father.

"Well, you might as well know. I'm very fond of Maud—she's my favourite, as a matter of fact—but she does fly off at such tangents. Her temper's a bit uncertain, you see, and when she came home from the shop to-night I felt certain that something had upset her."

"Perhaps she was worried about business?" suggested Tom.

Mr. Latimer digested this slowly.

"Perhaps you're right, Tom—do you mind me calling you 'Tom'?" he went on quickly.

The young man laughed uneasily. He had no urgent desire to be called by his Christian name by this man, but he felt it was up to him to help to bridge the gulf.

"Not at all," he replied; "I'd be very glad for you to call me 'Tom'." In his heart he had the comforting reservation that if the other did want to call him "Tom," he had only that night in which to do it.

"Where's Maud now?" he said, pausing at the top of the stairs.

"She's in her room. Shall I tell her you're here?"

"If you don't mind."

"Well, you'd better come down—there's only Mother there."

Mrs. Latimer eyed the visitor glumly. But, then, she was the type of woman who eyed every fresh person who swam into her orbit glumly. And, to her somewhat rigid system of thinking, this exceptionally well-dressed young man couldn't pos-

She seized on the words.

"Perhaps not—not if your intentions are strictly honourable and above-board, that is."

He kept control of his temper.

"They are sufficiently honourable and above-board, Mrs. Latimer, for me to want to take Maud up to my people to-night—that is, if she will come," he replied with spirit.

The words had a distinctly mollifying effect on the gorgon; but Mrs. Latimer was not the type of woman to give up her principles without a struggle.

"If you were a mother yourself, you would understand my feelings, Mr. Farrar," she went on; "you see, Maud has always been such a pure girl."

It was no good; he couldn't help it; the vision of the "pure girl" pirouetting slowly on that very spot completely naked except for her stockings less than twenty hours before, came to tickle his risibilities. He started to laugh—and went on laughing.

Mrs. Latimer bridled, looking more sailor-like than ever.

"I don't see anything to laugh at in my remark; any young man who had a proper feeling of respect would know better," was the stern reproof of the woman he already hated to think might be a prospective mother-in-law.

He quickly sobered himself. He had been guilty of very bad manners, and he frankly admitted it.

"I'm very sorry, Mrs. Latimer.....I was thinking of something else," he tried to explain.

"It seems to me that Maud has become very unsettled since she picked up with you, young man," Mrs. Latimer continued. "Take to-day, for instance; she came home, after going to Mr. Slaney, the dentist—"

"I can understand Mr. Slaney upsetting her," the caller commented.

The woman bridled.

"Why do you say that?" she challenged.

He gave her what he tried to believe was a disarming smile.

"Well, you see, Mrs. Latimer, I've met Mr. Slaney—and I don't like him. He reminds me I can quite imagine him upsetting know there was anything wrong suddenly."

"Yes, Mrs. Latimer, I did come here to see Maud. But my time is very short, and I have a great deal to do. And Maud must know I'm here; her father went up to tell her at least ten minutes ago. I can't understand why she hasn't come down."

"She's in one of her tempers," vouchsafed May, her mouth full of bread and butter. She proffered the information with a delighted giggle.

Tom had suffered so much that the words left his lips before he realized what he was saying.

"In that case she'd better stay where she is." Picking up his hat, he held out his hand to Mrs. Latimer.

"Good-bye, if I don't see you again," he said.

"But I can't understand it at all," replied the gorgon. "First you say you come here to see my daughter—and then you without so much as a message for her! Here, you, May—p to Maud's room and see whatever she and your father are g about. Say that Mr. Farrar's here and that he go."

astily swallowing the last dregs in the cup of cocoa, the rose excitedly from her chair. She saw a domestic drama to be staged, and was exhilarated at the prospect of playing t in it.

All right, Mums," she said, and sped away.

om underwent a further agony of waiting. Already he was ssed of certain information, and this was disquieting. Appar- Maud was staying in her room because of a fit of the tan- a, a process of mental turmoil to which she was prone.

ut what had he to do with it? Once before he had had to : because of a domestic *fracas*, and—perhaps like a fool—d been willing enough to forgive. But this sort of thing beyond sense; it couldn't be allowed to go on repeating ; in any case, he wasn't going to put up with it. Why d he? He hadn't done anything—that is——

as it because of what had happened the night before that l now refused to see him?

You'd better sit down again," advised Mrs. Latimer.

Yes, take a pew," supported her son.

om shook his head.

No, I won't sit down again, thank you, Mrs. Latimer—I ' must be off."

"Well, you know your own business best, but, if I had a young man who was so impatient, I should be inclined to tell him to get about his business for good; that I should.....O here you are," as a party of three entered from the direction of the upstairs room.

Maud looked as beautiful as ever, but her face was stormy. And she eyed Tom as though he were an enemy. It was the same kind of expression she had had when she insulted him the other morning in the dress-shop.

"What do you want?" she demanded; "aren't I ever to have any time to myself?"

Tom looked at her as though she had gone suddenly mad. Indeed, he felt she had.

"I'm afraid I don't understand you, Maud—what do you mean? You know we had an arrangement for eight o'clock, and because you didn't turn up at the top of the road, I came along to see if anything was wrong. I half-promised my people to take you up there to-night—but I can see now you don't want to come."

The thought of thrashing out this impossible position in front of all these other people—most of whom he strongly disliked—put a fresh load on his shoulders; but, because directly he saw the girl, he knew he was still terribly in love with her, he kept his temper and endeavoured to bring some kind of sense into this crazy business.

But the girl would have nothing of it. She appeared to have definitely made up her mind to insult him—and insult him so grossly that he would never want to see her again. It seemed a set plan.

"Of course I don't want to see your people," she said: "or you, either, if it comes to that! If you had sense you would have known it was finished."

The crudity of the statement overcame him: the surprise of it staggered him; the cruelty made him clench his hands and step up to her.

"Very well," he said tensely. "I take you at your word. It is finished. And because you have finished it in the way you have, I want to tell you this: if I saw you lying in the gutter in the future, I wouldn't pick you up. Good-bye."

Without a word to anyone else present, he turned away, walked across the room, opened the door, passed through and shut it behind him.

CHAPTER NINE

LAUGHTER IN THE WINGS

I

Now that she was alone again, Maud set herself some serious thinking. Why had she treated Tom Farrar in such a manner that night? How was it possible that she had been able to behave in this cruelly callous way—she was willing enough to admit she had been cruelly callous—towards the boy who, less than twenty-four hours before, had been her lover? To many people, she supposed, such complexity of conduct would have seemed inexplicable. Many ordinary persons would have considered her crazy.

But she wasn't an ordinary person—and therein must rest the secret.

She had behaved in that apparently extraordinary fashion that night because she was Maud Latimer; because there was something in her which prompted—indeed, forced—her to do so. What was more, she had made no effort to conquer this desire.

Perhaps the chief reason why she had suddenly tired of the young man to whom she had so freely given herself the night before, was because he had formed so unsatisfactory a lover. Oh, he had been sweet enough—his incoherent mumblings of gratitude had pleased her at the time—but these did not make up for the physical disappointment she had experienced.

But the reality had proved so different from the anticipation—that same anticipation which had caused her so much previous unrest. She had supposed that a boy like Tom Farrar, living his life, would be experienced, would know his side of the business. She had wanted at least half an hour of concentrated joy, of fierce physical delight. Instead, it had been all over so quickly that

she had felt deliberately cheated. If this was "love," then something was seriously wrong somewhere; it simply wasn't worth the fuss. Either Boccaccio was a liar, and had written that story with his tongue in his cheek, or the Italians of his age were different...

To make matters worse, Tom had been seized with an acute attack of penitence immediately afterwards. When she had wanted him to try again—what had happened so far had been merely like biting at a cherry—he had appeared horrified.

"Good God! What have I done?" he had said, evidently panic-stricken.

The anti-climax had been so ridiculous that she had had to bite her tongue to keep back the scathing words. The fool! Suspended in mid-air with at least three-quarters of her feelings still craving fulfilment, she had felt like killing him!

And he was as blind as a bat!

"Oh, darling, I'm terribly sorry, please forgive me!" he had moaned.

She hadn't been able to reply. He was sorry in the wrong way; his regret was caused not by his own incompetence, but by the pangs of his conscience! How she had stopped from laughing she did not know!

This puling boy was of no use to her. Marry him? The very idea was preposterous! If he was no good as an occasional lover (which was all she had intended he should be), what chance had he of forming a satisfactory husband? She wanted a man who could match her spirit and her strength with his own—a man who could gratify all the ardent wishes she now knew she had in her nature. A man who was a brute, perhaps—she wouldn't mind that: he could strike her if he liked, providing he was a real lover. There must be such a man somewhere, and she would have to find him.

Knowledge had come to her that night; this was that, largely unsuspected until now, she had an immense craving for sex. Tom Farrar had certainly done something; he had roused to full flood passions which hitherto had been slumbering.

As for this incompetent boy, he must pass out of her life; she had no further use for him. He had played his part, and now he must leave the stage. All that romantic mooning!—it just made her feel sick! Thank goodness, he would be off to London ver-

soon. She wouldn't see him any more.

She didn't allow the knowledge that she had agreed to meet him at eight the following night at the top of Ashburton Gardens to weigh with her in the least; she had only given the promise in order to get rid of him. She was Maud Latimer—she could do what she wanted. Let the ordinary, everyday fools keep stupid promises, if they wanted to; she was big enough to study only herself. In any case, she had another appointment with Slaney, the dentist, at six-thirty, and she knew she wouldn't be fit for anything else after that.

She had felt so furiously angry after going up to her room the night before—the memory of the *débauche* was still rankling like a raw wound—that she had been unable to sleep. And always when she couldn't sleep she got up the next morning feeling terrible. This had been no exception; angry that life could be such a disturbing affair, she had upset her mother at breakfast, quarrelled with the conductor on the tram, spoke with such calculated cruelty to her "junior" at the dress-shop that the child burst out crying, and had received "Madame" Harting's justified rebuke with stony indifference. Not for the first time her employer seriously considered getting rid of this unsatisfactory assistant; but she might have saved herself the mental effort: her *employée* had already decided to leave at the first opportunity. What right had she—Maud Latimer—to be in this sordid, humiliating, stinking dress-shop, forced to wait on women infinitely her inferiors? Maud felt that morning, as she had felt on so many previous days, that she was destined for greatness: she should have been a world-famous actress, a celebrated film-star, even a notorious courtesan, having the world at her feet, and hundreds of devoted men, anxious to do her bidding and to fulfil her slightest wish. That was her true *rôle*.

She was Maud Latimer!

This disgruntled mood had lasted all day. Consequently, when she turned up at Oswald Slaney's surgery, the dentist noticed a deep frown on the face that to him was beautiful enough in its sensuous beauty to have launched at least ten thousand ships. The sight distressed and worried him; he wondered if he had committed any fault.

"Wretched day, hasn't it been?" he murmured, with provisional banality, hoping to break the tension.

"Vile!" was the abrupt rejoinder.

A minute later the patient moved impatiently in the chair.

"Damn it! You're *hurting* me!" she exclaimed stormily.

Oswald Slaney's never very satisfactory bowels turned to ter. He breathed heavily, perspiration bedewing his prominent e.

"I'm terribly sorry!" he said; "I'm afraid that nerve must a trifle exposed." He ached to add: "My beautiful, adorable nature, I wouldn't hurt you for the whole world!"

But afraid to trust himself to further speech, he feasted his es instead on the girl's breasts which were palpitant with their ner's emotion. If only he dared...!

The session was not a success. Whatever hope he might ve believed he possessed before was now incontinently dashed the ground. As he came out into the hall to see her off, and murmur a perfunctory "Good night, Miss Latimer,"—a feeling to which she made no reply—Slaney ground his own entures in impotent anguish. He did not look a Nero, but he ould cheerfully have sentenced a whole nation to death and utilation at that moment.

As he had feared was the case, Maud Latimer had not given him a second thought after walking down the steep flight of teps leading to the street. At least, not the kind of thought he esired.

But the tooth which the fool had been tinkering about with continued to ache. She cursed it, and the tinkerer, as she got on the 'bus to go home. To add to her discomfiture, it now began to rain and she remembered that one of the shoes she was wearing let in the wet.

Altogether, it was not surprising, therefore, that she should be "in one of her tantrums," as her mother put it, when she finally reached Ashburton Gardens. She wanted to live in London and to be taken out that night to one of the famous West End restaurants, wearing orchids and being escorted by a Prince of the Royal Blood; instead, she had to endure the frousty atmosphere of her wretched home, and her thoroughly undesirable relations. Even her father, of whom usually she was quite fond—at any rate, he was easily the best of a very

mouldy batch—looked what he was that night: a sea failure, a man who had lost almost every pretence to self-respect.

She refused to eat any supper, and went straight to her room. There she stayed, sitting in the chair with the missing casters drawn up close to the spluttering gas-fire. She knew that it was past eight o'clock, the time she had arranged to meet Tom Farrar, but the knowledge only gave her a sense of sardonic satisfaction. She was inflicting pain on someone else, and she was glad.

When her father came up to tell her that the reporter was in the house, and was anxiously awaiting her, she remained obdurate.

"But you ought to go down to see him, Maud," pleaded Edwin Latimer; "after all, you did arrange to meet him, you know. I must say, he seems a very decent young chap!"

She exploded at that. "Young chap" was one of her father's favourite expressions, but it happened also to be one of the terms that always set her teeth on edge.

"Tell him to go to the Devil—that I've finished with him," she cried.

It took another full quarter of an hour's earnest entreaty on the part of her father to induce her to show any sign of relaxing, and then, when she got up impatiently, she had flung a fine bomb shell.

"If you haven't the guts to tell him to go to the Devil, I will have!" she said.

She recalled it all now. She remembered the strained expression in Tom Farrar's face, which had changed so quickly into a deathly mask: she recalled the look of unutterable contempt, scathing loathing in his eyes as he had given her that final stare. Any other girl, she supposed, would have felt at least sorry, not ashamed.

She had neither of these feelings.

She was Maud Latimer.

It was said of Graham Loder that he had the face of an angel and the voice of an archangel and a mind like a sewer. Perhaps that was why he was such a superlatively good News Editor for the

Daily Banner, and the one *employé*, apart from Bickersdyke, the Editor-in-Chief, whom the Proprietor, the fabulously wealthy Hebrew, Hector Simons, considered absolutely indispensable.

Loder looked like the better type of West End actor: he was always immaculately dressed—even his taste in such accessories as ties, socks and handkerchiefs was unimpeachable—and, with his clean-cut features, and thick, prematurely white hair, he arrested immediate attention. When to these other qualities, the stranger discovered that Nature had given Loder a voice that was fascinating to listen to, it was usually some time before he—it took much longer in the case of a woman—could settle himself to business. It was difficult to realize that Loder was a real person—and still more difficult to find him earning his living in a newspaper office. He was more like Hollywood's conception of a filmable Pope.....

Tom Farrar experienced this feeling in a pronounced degree upon being taken into the News Editor's room shortly after his arrival at the *Banner* building in Fleet Street. His cicerone was none other than Alan Bickersdyke himself: it was a set rule with Bickersdyke to perform this office with every newcomer. It established, he used to say, a "friendly feeling." This happy state of affairs generally lasted until the latest recruit "fell down" on an important story. Then the change of front was swift, vitriolic and deadly.

Apropos of these waspish humours of the very remarkable man who now ruled over the editorial destinies of the *Banner* and all who worked on it, there was an amusing yarn currently going about Fleet Street. It seemed that Hector Simons, who had many other business interests besides his newspaper, but who was inordinately proud of the sensational sheet, was taking a party of friends over the *Banner* building when he stopped outside a certain door.

"Now here, gentlemen," he said impressively, excitement emphasizing the accent that he had learned as a youth in Houndsditch, "is the room of the greatest mind in modern journalism. Mr. Bickersdyke, the Editor of the *Daily Banner*, is not only a brilliant newspaper-man, but he's a most polished and cultured gentleman.....come in; I'll introduce you."

The speaker suddenly opened the door. But so intent was his Editor on the task he had in hand at the moment that Bickers-

dyke failed to notice the circumstance. Instead, he concentrated further on what he was doing.

"You bloody fool!" he screamed raucously; "who told you you were a reporter? Get out before I murder you! Here," scribbling on a piece of paper, "take that to the Cashier; it's payment for the lousiest week's work I've ever known!"

Mr. Hector Simons closed the door quietly behind him.

"The Editor appears to be busy," remarked one of the visitors, and the Jew, usually very quick on the uptake, murmured something entirely non-committal.

On this particular occasion the newcomer to the staff had found him all smiles and good graces.

"How are you, Farrar?" he said breezily, springing up from his seat behind the enormous desk which seemed to fill at least half of the room, and was a very effective barricade against any too caustic a critic of the paper's policy. "I'm delighted to see you, my dear fellow! That was a grand story you sent us—so good, in fact, that I decided a place simply had to be found for you on the paper. How does it feel like to be working for the *Banner*, eh?"

The recruit might reasonably have replied that the question was somewhat premature, seeing that he hadn't started to do any work yet, and had merely reported for duty, but he answered conventionally enough.

"I'm looking forward to it tremendously," he said.

Bickersdyke leaned back in his chair, which he had resumed after shaking hands.

"You'll find it a bit strange at first, no doubt," he remarked; "I did myself; Fleet Street is so entirely different from the Provinces. But all the best men come from the Provinces—I did myself," in a complacent tone.

"You ought to find life on the *Banner* very interesting," the speaker continued; "I wouldn't change my job for anything else in the world. Simons, the proprietor of the paper, makes as many millions a year, I suppose, as I do thousands, but I'd rather be myself than he."

Bickersdyke paused, and Tom thought it was time he said something himself.

"I can well believe it," he replied.

"You feel that, do you?" exclaimed the Editor enthusiastically; "I'm glad, because it shows you are a real newspaper-man. In spite of what the cynics say—and you'll find plenty of cynics in modern Fleet Street—newspaper work is about the most romantic thing there is left to-day. Think of the power one has... Why, by front-paging him in the *Banner*, I can make or ruin any man I like!" As though intoxicated by the thought, Bickersdyke leaned back in his chair and beamed.

"I'll be taking you along to the News Editor in a minute," he went on. "His name's Loder, and he's the best man at his job in Fleet Street—which means the world. Loder's a hard man to please—I'm warning you about that, straight away—but we are all hard to please on the *Banner*, if it comes to that. I am myself; I have to be."

Feeling that again he had to say something, Tom answered: "I shall do my best."

A remarkable change came over the Editor; this emotional convulsion—it was nothing less—startled Farrar.

"For God's sake don't use that canting phrase!" Bickersdyke cried; "like religion it's the last refuge of the weak-minded! We shall want more than your 'best' on the *Banner*, Farrar; we shall want all your brains, all your guts and all your soul; otherwise, you won't be the slightest use to us. I get as many as five hundred applications a week to join this paper. Think of that; five hundred applications a week! And I chose you! For Christ's sake, don't let me down!"

This time Tom kept silent. Discretion was much the better part, he decided. Whether—as he was beginning to think must be the case—the speaker was an uncertified lunatic, or whether Bickersdyke was merely showing off, it was the wisest course to remain mum. He did so, prompted by two other feelings—one, that having entered the gates of Bedlam, he must make the best of it, and the second, that everything he had previously heard concerning life on the *Banner* was evidently merely a pale shadow of the truth.

"Forgive me," now said the Editor, making another swift and startling change; "but when I think of my responsibilities on this paper, of keeping up a circulation of nearly three million copies a day—think of it, Farrar; nearly three million copies a day!—is it any wonder that I go off half-cock sometime work

"Did you write that, Mr. Bickersdyke?" He knew that it had been written by an American newspaper-man named Stanley Walker, but he was tempted to put the enquiry.

The other hedged.

"Never mind who wrote it; it is the best definition of News ever put on paper. Keep it and study it.....and now," rising, "for Mr. Loder."

III

The introduction had been very brief.

"Here is your new star reporter, Loder," stated Bickersdyke with a smile that didn't strike Tom as being altogether friendly; "don't work him too hard at first; he's only here on a three-months' trial."

Trying to disregard what he considered was, an ill-timed pleasantry at his own expense, Tom concentrated his attention on Loder. The News Editor of the *Daily Banner* was an entirely different type from Bickersdyke. Whether the latter was a fool, he could not quite decide—incidentally, he had to revise this opinion very drastically before long—but Loder obviously was a master of his job. The man had an icy quality about him; when he looked at you, it was like a sword going through your brain. That was Tom's first impression, anyway.

Loder gave a brief answering smile, before saying: "All right, A. B., I promise not to kill him during the first week, at any rate."

"No—I may want him to write leaders later on," was the cryptic rejoinder before the Editor left the room.

Loder wasted no time.

"Sit down, Mr. Farrar," he said, pointing to a chair already placed in position.

There followed a short but swift examination. How long had he (Farrar) been on the *Tribune*? What kind of work had he done? What kind of work did he want to do?

This did not take more than a couple of minutes, and at the end Loder summed up the situation.

"As Mr. Bickersdyke has probably already told you, Farrar," (the "Mr." had been dropped by this time), "you will find life in Fleet Street a very different proposition to the Provinces. Here, a reporter is supposed to be capable of doing ev-
able

kind of job. I don't say that we shall be sending you to report on international situations yet awhile," here the icy smile flitted across his face again, "but, all the same, generally speaking, we want men on the *Banner* to be equally good at writing up the current prices of bacon and getting the behind-the-scenes story of the latest murder or Society scandal. Do you follow me?"

"I think so, Mr. Loder." Decidedly this was a very different journalism from what he had already known.

"That's good," the mellifluous voice continued. "And now, having told you things that you must be prepared to do, I am going to give you a few 'don'ts.' You must never tell me a lie. I'm pretty used to detecting lies—because if you do I shall certainly find you out. So, if you are unlucky enough to fall down on a story you must give me the real reason why you fallen down. You will find me sympathetic—in reason. 'Don't' No. 2 is never to try to do anything but your best on any job which you are sent out. 'Don't' No. 3: you will get liberal expenses, but don't ever try to make anything out of them. Short, you've got to play the game with me. Understand?"

"Yes—I do."

"If you make good after this three months' trial, there may be a job—I can't promise anything, of course, at this date—a thousand a year job waiting for you. We want the best men in journalism and we're prepared to pay the price—but they've got to be the best men. You're the right age for us and I should say the right temperament. You know the sort of stuff we print—you've studied the paper, of course?"

"Yes—every day for years," was the answer.

The words were greeted with another fleeting smile.

"It hardly seems credible," returned the News Editor, "to get men in here asking for a job who obviously can't tell the difference between the *Daily Banner* and the *Daily Record*. You seem to have your wits about you, Farrar—but, by God, you have to use them on this paper! That's all for now—and I've got a job for you."

As a result of this electrifying interview, short as it had been, Tom felt himself keyed-up. He had known, without waiting to be told, that so long as he was on the *Banner* pay-list, he must be ready and waiting—on his toes—at any minute of the day or night. No wonder the *Banner* had a shifting sta-

working at such high pressure, men's nerves as well as their bodies must pay the inevitable penalty.

But he was young and healthy, and he was determined to make the grade. If he didn't then it wouldn't be his own fault. Mentally, as he looked round, and saw the milling crowd of reporters and sub-editors in the huge editorial room outside, he pledged himself anew to this exacting but exciting service. He felt he had summed up Loder correctly: he was a man who, super-efficient himself, demanded super-efficiency in others. Ruthless if ill-served, he was possibly a warm champion of those whom he considered deserved his trust and confidence. Well, it seemed fair enough; and he asked for nothing better.

"There may be a story in this or there may not," Loder said briskly, breaking in on his thoughts. "Take this cutting"—passing over a sheet of paper on which had been pasted a small news-item clipped from somewhere; "get away off there and see what's at the back of this application; the angle is, of course, that a General in the British Army who has been given many decorations for bravery, is apparently so superstitious that he wants the number on his house changed from '13' to '12A.' This ought not to take you long; but, in any case, report to me at four o'clock either here or by telephone. Is that quite clear?"

Tom, nodding, went away on his first *Daily Banner* assignment.

There followed a month in which he never quite knew whether he was standing on his head or on his heels. The world had, indeed, turned topsy-turvy. He seemed to be moving in some phantasmagoric state peopled with freaks, charlatans and other figures so strange and incredible that they appeared to have no relation to life as he had formerly known it. All these were members of the amazing cast that made up the play—a play composed of an endless number of acts, all of which he had to review for the benefit of the *Daily Banner* readers.

He had started disastrously. It was a new technique for him, getting interviews from people who refused to be interviewed. Back in Burminster he had found everybody so anxious to be noticed by the Press that all doors had been open; but here in London it was evidently different: people seemed actually

to loathe the very name of reporters, especially if they came from the *Daily Banner*.

His approach had been quite wrong, of course; arriving at the house in Clarges Crescent, that imposing thoroughfare not far from Paddington Station, he had rung the bell and, when the butler appeared, had said:

"I'm a reporter from the *Daily Banner*. Is General Fitzroy-Waters in, please?"

He might have been prepared by the way the menial's nose quivered at the mention of the paper; but his only feeling was one of anger as the servant replied:

"In no circumstances will the General see a *Daily Banner* reporter."

He then shut the door in the caller's face.

Tom seethed. He had never been treated like this before in his life. Feeling astounded as well as infuriated, he put his finger to the bell again—and kept it there.

After some seconds' delay, the butler showed himself once more.

"If you don't go away, I shall call the police," he said haughtily.

"Listen, you fool!" returned the reporter, seeing red, "I've come here to have a talk with General Fitzroy-Waters, and I'm going to have that talk. I'm a reporter, and I have been sent here to interview the General. Can't you understand?"

The man, instead of being mollified, drew himself up as though he had a bad smell directly beneath his nose.

"I've already told you that it is impossible for you to see the General," he replied.

"Why?" snapped Tom.

"Because the General has given orders that no newspaper reporter is ever to be allowed in."

"In the name of God—why?" persisted Farrar.

"There is a reason," replied the man, after the style of a Cabinet Minister rebuking a too-inquisitive back-bencher.

This was a poser. What did the reporters of romantic fiction do in such cases? Tom wished to Hell he knew. From feeling hot he now went cold at the prospect of returning to Loder and confessing that he had fallen down badly on the very first job he had been given.

"But I *must* see the General," he went on, desperation driving him hard.

At that point there came an interruption. A fierce, choleric-looking elderly man who might have stepped out from the pages of a comic weekly, stalked out of the door on the right of the little hall.

"What the devil is going on here, Peters?" he demanded.

Tom saw his chance.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but are you General Fitzroy-Waters?" he asked politely.

The owner of the empurpled face choked.

"I am!" he snapped; "and what the devil has that got to do with you?"

"I want to have a talk with you, if I may, General."

It seemed likely that the man who had spent several years of active life on the Afghan border would throw a fit.

"PETERS!" he shouted, pointing to the door.

The butler tried to explain.

"I've already told this reporter-person-----" he started, but was caught up.

"A *reporter*!" exploded General Fitzroy-Waters; "get out of my house, you scum!" disregarding the fact that the young man who was criticizing had not yet crossed the threshold of his dwelling.

Tom told the story of his failure with shamed face and sinking heart.

"You went entirely the wrong way to work, Farrar," was the unsympathetic comment of the News Editor: "you should have tipped the butler—then you would have got the story."

"Not from that man, Mr. Loder," replied the reporter, aghast at the advocacy of such heretical methods.

Loder's face remained non-committal.

"But it was your first job, and so I won't say too much. Look in the paper to-morrow, and you will see how the *Banner* handles things like that! Meanwhile get some tea and then come back here; I'll probably be

The next morning Tom
nervous haste. Upon re

The evangelist ripped out an oath.

"No! No! Don't be a fool! How can you have love without a man? You must have a man.....that is where my darling Diddums comes in." An expression which Tom could only describe as horrible crept into the speaker's face. "Diddums is wonderful," she explained; "he has never let me down yet."

"'Diddums' is Mr. Thoms, of course?"

"Yes."

A host of questions thronged through Tom's mind. As most of them were distinctly Rabelaisian in character, he felt that the woman would have had great satisfaction in answering them, and in the fullest possible detail, but he kept himself strictly to what he considered might be printable.

"Tell me something about your life in the Arctic regions, Mrs. Thoms," he urged.

"Oh, it's wonderful!" she cooed harshly; "the Eternal Snows, you know.....the Great Silence.....the loneliness—not that you mind that, because you're with the man you love, and his heart is beating warmly for you all the time.....but here *is* Diddums," as a man entered from the next room.

"Diddums, darling, this lovely boy is a reporter from the *Daily Banner* and he has come here to interview me."

"And you, too, if possible, Mr. Thoms," stated Tom.

Egbert Thoms proved even stranger to look at than either his name or his profession implied: he was a short, squat-figured person of middle age with a pair of cunning eyes and a full Edwardian beard. The latter he preserved to keep him warm amidst the "eternal snows," Tom assumed.

"Now, *do* talk to the lovely boy, Diddums!" pleaded his amazing spouse.

Keeping his eye on his wife, the Arctic explorer began what proved to be a very odd recital. He spoke it, moreover, in a high-pitched voice which, after his wife's glowing tribute to his physical prowess, Tom found even more puzzling.

"I love my little Woosie," he said; "I love her so much that I hated bringing her back to civilization. All this," pointing round the richly-appointed room, "is so much sham, so much dross! Only in the Great Silences to which I am used can one find Truth."

"And love?" insinuated the reporter.
 "Yes...and Love," was the prompt reply. "I met Woosie when the ship in which she was taking that world-cruise stopped at Vancouver. I was there taking on supplies and planning a further trip to——"

"The Eternal Snows," supplied Farrar.
 "The Eternal Snows," promptly confirmed Egbert Thoms. "Directly she entered my life, I knew that everything would be changed. She has courage, she has wit. She has the smallest feet of any woman in the world—she only takes threes."

"Two-and-three-quarters," pouted Woosie.
 "Two-and-three-quarters," corrected the explorer, in a self-reproving tone; "the first night we were alone in the Arctic drank success in champagne out of her little shoe."

"Very romantic," commented the interviewer.
 "Wasn't it?" beamed Diddums. "You wouldn't believe what an effect Woosie had on me up there in the Far North she hung lovely blue silk curtains in our igloo; she tied purple velvet bows on them; she sang her old cabaret songs to me and danced for my delight in her little bare feet."

"Didn't she feel cold?"
 "Cold!" screeched Woosie; "why should I be cold when my heart was on fire?"
 Tom felt like clutching his head; either he was mad or they were.

"Well, if you'll excuse me, I'll be going now," he stated.
 "But you haven't heard me tell you of Woosie's wonderful cooking," complained Diddums; "she's awfully good at blanching soup; she serves it to me with prune brandy..."

Loder listened carefully.

"The way to write that story," he explained, "is to bring out all the blatant idiocies of both these freaks, but not to let the reader imagine that you're not treating the subject properly. It's like a doctor treating a lunatic—follow me."

"I think so."

"Then go away and write it. If it turns out as good as you've told me, it ought to get a double-column heading."

The story was pronounced a "wow." It made even the case-hardened Whittier grin maliciously.

The latest astounding matrimonial escapade of the ex-Montmartre cabaret-dancer appeared under the following double column headlines :

ARCADIA IN THE ARCTIC

"WOOSIE" WOOS "DIDDUMS" IN THE ETERNAL SNOWS

And Tom had had his name put to the sludge ; he did not know whether to be glad or to be ashamed.

But it made his reputation—for at least a day—in the *Banner* office.

But, as time went on, he could not decide definitely whether he had made good, either in the eyes of Loder, or of Bickersdyke, but he was determined on one thing : that he would stay in Fleet Street for so long as Fleet Street would have him. The thought of returning to the Provinces was utterly out of the question ; life there would be intolerably dull after this incessant movement which, although sometimes maddening, stirred the senses as he knew nothing else could possibly do.

If he had only known, both Loder and Bickersdyke were very pleased with him. But, after the manner of their kind, they kept this knowledge to themselves. The strain on the nerves in the *Banner* office was sufficiently severe, they knew, not to allow any member of their staff to become "high-hat."

IV

Maud Latimer looked at the words scribbled on the envelope with a dulling sense of disaster.

She had written to Tom Farrar at the *Daily Banner* office in Fleet Street, and now here was the letter returned in a larger envelope with the following words inscribed on the front :

I have not opened it. I shall not open any other letter you may send me. You finished it yourself—it must remain finished.

So he had kept to his word ! It was she who had been p the fool ! When she thought of what possibly might be in of her, and the dark days in which there could be no hope—despair—she flung herself on her bed, and cursed both Go the world.

If only she could have cried, it might have helped. But the ould not come ; instead of getting that relief, she was r a fresh wave of terrible anger—anger that was mixed spair.

That she—Maud Latimer !—should be placed in this po t the time, she had not given it a thought ; other girls e "caught," but it could not occur in her case. Besides, I ad been so incompetent, so hesitant.....how could it po ave happened ?

She had been living with this Dread for three days now ourse she might be imagining things ; but she had to know he had to know.

The Fear had come upon her quite suddenly. It was he was at Ivy's, listening to the tale which her sister ha with much self-righteous neighings) of a maid she had l ismiss because, "would you believe it, my dear—I foun he was actually in the family-way !"

In the family-way ! What a ghastly phrase ! What a non, plebeian, sordid, horrible way of putting it ! But of c vy was like that : she used all the conventional phrases.

"You haven't made it up with that boy Farrar, I supp rent on her sister, having come to an end of her narrative.

She shook her head.

"Of course not ! Why should I ?"

But directly she spoke, she was struck by a stalking terr e more dreadful because it had come so suddenly out of the

It couldn't be, she kept telling herself on the way home. *Suppose it WAS ? What a come-down it would be ; possib'e kind of personal humiliation would be thrown a he wouldn't receive any sympathy from anyone—except aps, from her father, and he would be powerless to gi ny practical help. The man responsible for her 'cond: another of those horrible words!) was in London—and, th e way she had treated him, he would probably refuse to ything more to do with her.*

But she would write to him (she went on to reflect). And she did, directly she reached home.

It was terrible, that waiting. Suppose Tom Farrar refused to have anything more to do with her?—as she feared he would. What then? What would she be able to *do*? What *could* she do? Suicide? Perhaps.....if only she could find the courage and the way.....But the way would be easy enough.....she just had to turn the gas-tap on in her room, after closing the windows and putting paper in the cracks of the door.....Yes, that would be easy enough.....

With a sudden stifling feeling, she had to stop for breath. The picture of her making those preparations was too much; her mind revolted at the imagery.

Yet she must do something; this suspense was unendurable; it was driving her mad. She must have been on the border-line of craziness just now when she had seriously considered the thought of killing herself.

Somehow or other—her thoughts were so blurred that she could scarcely remember anything distinctly—she reached home. In the downstairs living-room, her mother looked at her questioningly.

"What's the matter with you, Maud?" Mrs. Latimer asked, her manner directly suspicious; "you look ill."

She improvised some kind of reply.

"It was that fool of a dentist," she said; "he gave me hell to-night."

The answer did not appear to satisfy her mother.

"I can't understand that," she remarked with a denseness that brought Maud almost to screaming point; "Ivy has always told me what care he takes."

Her daughter exploded.

"Damn Ivy.....damn you all!" she cried.

The letter came two nights later. Picking it up from where it had been placed by the side of her supper-plate, she rushed up to her room.

In this refuge she felt temporarily safe—safe from those availing peering eyes, those wide-open mouths. How those same eyes would stare, how those same lips would talk *when.....!*

It was with trembling fingers that she tore open the

Two nights before—that was when that sudden paralysing fear had come to strike her down—in that long letter she had written to Tom Farrar, she had told him of her misgivings; how she was afraid that she might be going to have a baby, going on to say that if he wanted her, she would come immediately to London and start living with him until such time as they could be married.

"After all, darling, I still feel that we belong to each other, don't you?" she had wound up.

Of course, she had not meant a word of it. The last thing she wanted was to be tied for life to this reporter, who she considered was responsible for all the trouble and turmoil that had come into her life; but in this desperate situation, she thought she had to have somebody to whom to cling. For what could she possibly do, without money, and without friends in the event of the worst happening?

That was why, even though contempt for herself was scourging her, she had written to Farrar. Bitter self-revilement had been in her heart as she went out to post the letter. Why, she was no better than that servant girl of Ivy's who, according to her own confession, had implored the butcher-boy to marry her! She, Maud Latimer, to be placed on a level with a wretched slut of a maid!

And now she had had her answer. She had been turned down; her offer had not even been considered. The man responsible, the man to whom instinctively she had turned in this dreadful dilemma, had refused even to open her letter!

Finished! It was a sinister word. As the thought stabbed her afresh, she launched into a fresh fit of cursing.

When she got down to breakfast next morning, her mother tackled her again.

"I've been talking to your father about you, Maud, and I am determined to know the truth—what is it that is worrying you? Are you still in love with that fellow Farrar?"

"No—I hate him!" She had burned her boats in this direction, for after the stormy scene of the night of Tom's departure, she had made the statement that she never wished to hear his name mentioned again. "I can't tell you why," she had gone on darkly to suggest, "but it is a sufficiently good reason."

She did not imagine at the time, of course, that she was pre-

paring a rod for her own back. Indeed, the words had gone from her mind; but now she realized that they had been stored up in her mother's memory; and that Mrs. Latimer was bringing them forth as evidence for her alarm.

"Then what is the matter?" As your mother, I demand to know! And whilst I am on the subject, Maud, let me also tell you that I strongly object to you using such language as you have got into the habit of doing. I know that you haven't much respect for me, as your mother, but I think you might show a little more consideration than you do. Your father agrees with me."

She managed to get away. Her breakfast had consisted of a cup of tea and a piece of dry toast; she felt that anything else would choke her. Before she had dressed that morning, she had stood naked in front of the cracked mirror, giving herself a close and critical examination. Her stomach was as flat as ever it was, but this provided no reassurance; it was much too early, she knew, for any signs to be visible in that direction. But as the weeks went by...

So ragged were her nerves that she imagined that everyone was looking at her: in the street, in the tram, at the shop. Madame Harting was never very good-tempered herself first thing in the morning, and, as a result, she almost invariably had an aggrieved expression on her face. If she had not been weighed down by the load she was carrying, Maud would have flared up as her employer looked at her, and would have demanded what the woman meant by it. But now she kept back her anger; she knew that she might be dependent upon the charity of this woman whom normally she hated. It was a very humiliating reflection.

It happened quite by chance. She had not meant to eavesdrop on the two juniors, but once she caught the drift of their conversation, she felt compelled to stay.

"Yes, it's true right enough," she heard Lily Tring, her particular junior, say in a breathless voice: "she told me so herself...it happened about five weeks ago...he took her out in his car, and she had several drinks...on the way home..." "Well, you can imagine for yourself, Maisie, what he did...and poor Ethel couldn't stop him...and now she's got a baby."

"My gosh!" came the comment. "But she's in

have a baby in a job. What's she going to do?"

"She's going to some doctor out our way. A nasty piece of work named Zeitun. But he's helped a good many other girls, and Ethel hopes he'll help her... She's got three pounds laid up... she's going to him to-night; I'll let you know to-morrow..."

Maud walked away. She had heard enough. This Dr. Zeitun was a secret abortionist, of course; a man who would want money down, and to be paid in £1 notes; she had heard of his kind before. But for his own sake he would have to be discreet. And it should be easy to find him once she got out to Eastfields, where Lily Tring lived. In any case, she couldn't go to a doctor in her part of Burminster.

v

Dr. Lionel Zeitun, M. R. C. S., was a thin, shabbily-dressed man of middle age, smelling of drink. His consulting-room inspired about as much confidence as its owner. This new patient whose face, he noticed, was remarkably attractive beneath the thick veil she wore, and whose wedding ring looked so suspiciously bright, came straight to his office. There was no nonsense about her. That was the first thing he noticed.

"I've let a lot of you, Doctor," she said in a hard, clear voice. "I don't know how. I believe I am going to have a baby, and I want you to tell me if I'm right. If I'm right I shall want to come here again—that is, if it won't cost me too much; I want to be sure I can get the money."

The doctor coughed, and then said, "I'll do my best, Mrs. —"

"You're not a doctor, are you, Mrs. —?"

"Mrs. Forster," smiling so fugitively that it passed almost unnoticed. "Now you will hardly go behind that screen to take your time, will you?"

"Well?"

Lionel Zeitun coughed again. This hybrid Jew, who long since sold his professional honour for a few £1 notes which to gratify his passion for brandy and worse things, shrugged his thin shoulders.

"It is too early to be able to ascertain correctly, you stand," he replied; "but I should say that your uneasiness is tainly justified."

That was the line he always took; he put the fear of God into the women who came to him whether the diagnosis justified it or not. It meant that he always had a future hold on these creatures—a hold which he often pushed to the limit. He was specially determined to do so in the case of this new patient; inflamed by drink, as usual, her beautiful body as she had lain stripped on the shabby couch in the consulting-room had fired his senses.

"But when shall I *know*?" was the slowly-uttered question.

"You must come and see me again, Mrs.—er—Fortescue; in about a fortnight's time, say."

"Will you be able to tell then—for certain, I mean?"

"Of course. That will be ten shillings; do you mind paying now, Mrs. Fortescue?"

He would have charged her more, but did not want to be too exacting at the moment; besides, he was determined that this particular patient should pay in another way.

"Isn't there anything I can take?"

He shook his head.

"Not yet; later, perhaps.....but don't worry: come and see me again in a fortnight's time."

She went away, feeling that her legs were made of lead.

"You didn't turn up last night. It was very naughty of you!"

Encouraged by the responsive smile—it seemed a very faint smile, but he liked it all the better on that account—Oswald Slaney proceeded to be mildly playful. In the process he looked like a spavined horse endeavouring to turn itself into a skittish colt, but the impersonation was apparently successful. In any case, he was given a second smile.

"I'm most awfully sorry.....I should have telephoned, I know.....but I wasn't at all well last night.....I find that the work at the shop gets more and more trying." She sighed.

The dentist gulped. The small probe which he had picked up from the tray was put down again. He felt that the crucial moment had come; the girl was in the right mood (she was feeling sorry for herself, and therefore wanted sympathy). He himself had reached the limit of his endurance. There was no fool like a middle-aged fool passing through an Indian summer—he knew that; but he could fight no longer against his nature. He had to marry this girl or risk going crazy. If

down, he would sell his practice and clear out of the town—go on a world-cruise, perhaps; he could well afford it, or get away somewhere. Burminster would be impossible for him afterwards.

He felt that she might listen to him to-night, if only on account of a reaction from the Farrar upset. He had heard the whole story from Ivy Musgrave: how the two had quarrelled on the eve of the reporter going off to London, and how there seemed very little chance of the breach being healed.

So he risked it, beginning in short, staccato sentences, that reflected his highly nervous state.

"I'm very sorry, Miss Latimer.....very sorry.....and now I'm going to tell you something which you may find surprising something at which you may even laugh—although I hope you won't do that.....I love you, Miss Latimer.....I've loved you ever since that night I first met you at your sister's.....Of course I realize that there is a great difference in our ages, and all that sort of thing; I realize, too, that you will probably think it ridiculous my entertaining the idea...but I do entertain it, Miss Latimer, because I feel I can give you some of the good things in life which you so thoroughly deserve...in short, Miss Latimer, will you be my wife?"

It had worked! It had worked so easily that she could have weaned with laughter. All she had had to do was to assume a mature expression, drop her eyes, smile wistfully—and sigh that fools men were! But, with this contempt, came a feeling of relief. She now had a harbour, if she cared to take advantage of it; a safe anchorage. By marrying this man, this simpleton she would be able to shut everybody's mouth. The child, when she came, would be accepted as Stanley's; no questions would be asked, no suspicions aroused. Why should there be? Even Torrarr would not know the truth; he had not even read the letter which she had told him of last night.

was necessary ; she had to pretend to be Miss Innocence : a girl, unsophisticated and inexperienced, receiving her first proposal. In the effort she almost overdid it, turning herself into a heroine out of a Victorian novel.

But Slaney did not notice this ; he played up wonderfully. He himself now took on the image of a character out of an old number of *Punch*, circa 1890. He might have been a Du Maurier drawing; complete with handle-bars moustache, cycling stockings and a deer-stalker cap.....

When he spoke again, it was in character.

"I will not press you, my dear," he said. Then he coughed. "I should like to know, however, if you feel you can give me any hope?"

With her eyes looking into her lap, she replied :

"Yes. I think I can do that, Mr. Slaney, but not now," getting up from the chair. "I must have time to think; you know," very kindly, "you *did* take me by surprise. I never *imagined*..."

"Then go home and think about it. I want to be gentle with you.....of course. I realize this has been something of a shock.And the teeth can wait. But there is one more question before you go, my dear.....there is no one else?"

She lifted her eyes then and looked at him. A romanticist might have said that they were limpid pools of candour.

"No—there is no one else," was her answer.

VI

If anyone had talked to Basil Leadbeater about his soul, he would have laughed. So far as he knew, he didn't possess a soul, and he certainly didn't want one. He was quite happy with a body.

His body, being strong, and capable of an almost limitless amount of sexual indulgence, satisfied him. He regarded it as his principal pleasure; it certainly gave him an immense amount of enjoyment. The nickname of "Stallion," which he had amongst his few male associates, none of whom really liked him, he regarded as a compliment. It was a pleasing flattery.

Leadbeater was that strange work of Nature, the co-amoral man; he knew neither mercy nor conscience; two constant preoccupation, were things to be first purs

conquered. Playing no other game, he regarded this as the highest and, therefore, the finest form of sport.

Tall, sturdily built and muscular, he was the type to take the eye of a certain class of woman; and when they discovered, they did very quickly, that Leadbeater exuded a potent sense of sheer animalism, the rest was merely a question of time.

He had started on his Casanovian career at an early age. At fifteen he had been seduced by a nymphomaniacal housemaid, and, finding relish instead of dismay in the experience, he had put forth all his talents—which, in that direction, at least, were very considerable—to one end: consequently Life had been very full.

Now, at twenty-nine, he felt he was in the plenitude of his powers; that he had reached the apex, as it were. He was like Napoleon, always sighing for fresh worlds to conquer. And finding them.

When he heard other men say—as he did occasionally, in pubs and elsewhere—that they wished they knew where they could find a "nice bit of stuff that night," he smiled to himself. It seemed to him ridiculous that other men should experience dearth where he found such an abundance. Why, women were to be had on every hand, and they didn't wait to be asked, much of them!

He had had plenty of victories amongst the patients of Oswald Slaney passed over to him. Of course, one had to be careful; but, on the principle that every woman was a prospective live whore at heart, he had met with very few real reverses. They were easy to pick out, those who said women were subtle; simply didn't know what they were talking about. He could tell a woman was "easy" within ten minutes of meeting her; he did know how he had achieved this power; he was satisfied knowing that he possessed it.

On this particular night, Leadbeater had put off "something special," because he wanted to satisfy his curiosity. For some days now the tripe-bound (his own name for Oswald Slaney) had been behaving in a very mysterious way. Particularly round about six o'clock at night. This had happened for three successive evenings.

"You needn't wait, Leadbeater, you can go now," he had always said.

This was strange. It portended a mystery; and, as this portended, in turn, that Slaney wished him out of the way, he began to wonder what was in the wind. A woman? It seemed ridiculous; and yet that slimy toad, Slaney, was just the type to go soft over some young girl or other. He'd seen it happen before.

Having a crony in the shape of the dentist's receptionist (when he had nothing better on hand, he occasionally "obliged" Gracie Mapleton), he asked her if she knew anything about it.

"Don't I, jes?" she replied with a laugh. "The Scarecrow" (her name for Slaney) "is all warmed up about a girl who comes here at half-past six every night. Her name is Maud Latimer, and she is a sister of Mrs. Musgrave—you know Mrs. Musgrave?"

"The wife of that fellow who runs the antique shop?"

Gracie nodded.

"M'm, m'm. Well, this girl is her sister and Slaney's treating her free."

"Why?"

It was entirely outside Basil Leadbeater's mentality that anyone—least of all, an old curmudgeon like Oswald Slaney—should be so generous.

The receptionist smiled.

"Well, now you're asking!" she returned with an arch grin.

He grinned back, tentatively stroking her buttocks meanwhile.

"Like that, is it?"

"M'm, m'm. At least, I should say Slaney is hoping that it will be like that," was her final comment as she put on her hat preparatory to going home.

"One more question, Gracie—what's she like?"

"She'd make a marvellous tart," was the answer, with a wriggle of her flanks.

All of which is by way of preface to explaining why Basil Leadbeater was standing by the front gate of his employer's house. He had seen the girl go in, shortly after half-past six, and had been content to wait. As Gracie had intimated, she was a peach—and ripe for the plucking, if he was any thought of an old never-waser like Oswald Slaney glorious creature exclusively was unthinkable. He have a shot himself.

him. This remarkable fact (already Farrar had become thing of a cynic so far as celebrities' promises were concerned) encouraged him to go on talking.

"Come and see me by all means, my dear fellow," replied; "I've been expecting to hear from you; I suppose been too busy?... Well, we won't waste time talking now and dine with me to-night—don't trouble to dress."

It proved a wonderfully stimulating and, therefore, enjoyable evening: Hurlbut was one of the few men who had achieved success in a spectacular way who could carry his corn; had mellowed him, instead of giving him a swelled head.

"There are three qualities needed to be successful these days," he remarked over coffee: "Health, Ability and Luck—and the greatest of these is Luck. I've been lucky... Now tell me about yourself; I'm interested."

When Farrar had come to an end, the playwright threw a fresh log on the fire.

"Fine!" he said; "keep at it. But don't stay in Fleet Street too long—it's a blind alley." And when the reporter's fire expressed its owner's surprise, he continued: "Newspaper-work should only be a means to an end. You didn't know I was once a journalist, did you? No," with a grin, "that's a part of which I don't blazon abroad; you see, I was sacked (and deservedly so) from four papers in as many months. My boss went on, leaning across and waving his pipe emphatically, 'Fleet Street may teach you the beginnings of your art as a writer, but it won't keep you in your old job, or even in your middle age. Learn all you can from it, then clear out. This is too big a subject to be discussed now... come and see me again, perhaps I shall have some ideas then.'"

Although it was his night off, pure habit made Tom leave at the office on his way back from Hurlbut's flat in Little Inn.

Directly he showed himself he was seized by the arm and dragged into Joseph Whitier's room.

"From Burminster, don't you, Farrar?"

LAUGHTER IN THE WINGS

"Did you ever meet a girl there called Maud Latimer Tom, thinking that, for some unintelligible reason having his leg pulled, shot back a "Why?"

Whittier grinned.

"Why? She's been charged with a fellow named Le with murdering her husband !.....and we're sending Burminster to cover the story. That's why."

the *Banner* had spoken to him, he had felt inclined to say: "Oh, but I can't do it! You see, I was once in love with that girl—should be in love with her now if she hadn't treated me so badly—and it's too much, in any case, to expect me to go down there and report this horrible business!"

That is what he would have said, he supposed; but the dreadful truth was that the newspaper-man had conquered over the human being: although he felt nauseated, yet he had become so imbued with the general atmosphere of the *Daily Banner* office that the most important thing in life to him now was a "good story." Which was why he had kept silent.

Whittier had concluded:

"Pankhurst—you know him, don't you?—who is now our correspondent in Burminster, has just been on the 'phone to us. He says the story is going to be the greatest sensation locally for the past fifty years. He wants to do it himself, of course—but we're sending you, Farrar. Don't let us down. You were brought up in Burminster; you know the people; you know the general atmosphere of the place—we want the best story that any paper is going to print about this case; now get off with you."

All the way in the train (he was just able to catch the 10.15 which arrived at Burminster shortly after midnight) he pondered on this extraordinary twist of Fate. Apart from an occasional letter from Pankhurst, he had lost touch with affairs in Burminster. Consequently, he had not learned that Maud Latimer had got married. The information that she had wedded the slimy dentist, the man whom she was now accused of murdering, was therefore staggering. What he would have thought about it if the news had reached him earlier he did not know; but the truth was that distance, and his present extremely busy life, had forced the image of the girl out of his mind. Whenever he had thought of her, his feelings had been mixed; he had felt sorry that he had yielded to the temptation on the last night but one that he had been in Burminster, but against this regret fought the conviction that the girl on whom he had lavished so much thought and love possessed an "impossible" temperament and that there would have been nothing but quarrels if they had not parted. In any case, living the existence he did, marriage with any woman was entirely out of the question: it wouldn't have given either of them

a chance. "Fleet Street wives" were a subject of sardonic humour both in the *Banner* office and in the pubs which he frequented in his off-moments.

The train arrived in time at the Central Burminster station the sight of which brought back so many memories. The place had not changed in the least; he did not suppose it ever would change; Burminster was like that.

He had attended the brief police-court proceedings the next morning because his duty forced him to do so. The sordid court, as it had always done within his recollection, the mixture of unwashed humanity and sour, used-up air, was a warning to suffocation.

Something compelled him to look at the accused woman when the two prisoners entered the dock. Knowing the girl as he might he did, Tom was scarcely able to visualize what attitude she would present to that avil-eyed crowd of ghouls who had gathered to be present at her public shame. She might be defiant; she might be ravaged with anger, terrible to see, in her consciousness of her awful position.

Instead, as his eyes met hers—she gave the slightest sign of recognition, as they did so—she appeared entirely composed. At that dread moment she seemed to have acquired a personality which was as strange as it was impressive; one might have assumed that, instead of being faced with the most terrible of all charges, she was present at a stage-drama which she herself had written, which she was convinced would prove a success. Incredible as it was, this was the image which came instantly into Tom's mind.

And when she was told that together with her paramour she should be committed to the next Assizes to take her trial, on the charge of murdering her husband—the Chairman of the Bench that day, Tom noticed, was old Paish, the pawnbroker—she gave the speaker a little grave but graceful inclination of her head before turning away.

Astounding!

II

Tom had reached the stage when every out-of-town story he

wrote for his paper was signed (the *Banner* was now midway through a fierce personal publicity campaign) and this presented a new difficulty: should he see the Latimer family, or not? If he presented himself at either 216 Ashburton Gardens, or the Repton Road residence of the Birmingham brasses specialist, his action might be seriously misconstrued: it would possibly be thought that he had come—and in his hateful capacity of a sensation-mongering newspaper reporter—to gloat over the family misfortune, and to pillory further the Latimer shame.

As he debated the point over his lunch (for which he had no appetite) at the Crown Hotel, he was called to the telephone.

It was Loder speaking from the *Banner* office in Fleet Street.

"I want a good story about the Slaney case from you to-day, Farrar," said the News Editor; "human interest stuff.....see the family.....get their angle.....what does it feel like to have a woman charged with murder for a close relation?—that kind of thing.....write it raw.....it's a good chance for you.....By the way, we shall be keeping you on in Burminster until the Assizes. Do a story to-day and to-morrow about this Slaney case and then fill in your time sending us local specials; our circulation down there isn't what it ought to be, and we're looking to you to whip up interest. This murder trial ought to help, of courseWell, that's all: Good-bye."

And the line went dead.

Tom had had no chance to say anything himself, and even if the opportunity had been given him, he didn't know that he would have made any protest. How could he have done so?—he was a servant of the Public, inasmuch as he was a reporter on a London newspaper catering for millions of people who liked to have its daily sensations served up raw and bleeding. It did not trouble what means were employed as long as they got them. In his own way Loder was a genius: as usual, he had probed the mind of the average reader of the *Daily Banner* with uncanny skill; the masses would like to know the reaction of persons whose nearest relative was being charged with the murder of her husband. It might be a deplorable state of affairs, but it was true. And the *Banner* didn't waste any time. It merely went on serving its public. Its mentality was cruel, inhuman, abnormal, and

the sufferings of other people. That much Tom had already learned. So-called modern civilization was the crudest mockery of what it should have been. No wonder the Church had such a hopeless job.

Hardened as he had become during the past seven months, Tom now viewed his afternoon's work with something akin to horror. Yet it had to be done; if he didn't see the Latimer family—or at least some members of it—and send up the story that had been ordered, he would be sacked. Neither Loder nor Bickersdyke would accept any excuse. And if he had explained to the News Editor the relationship that had existed between the accused woman and himself before he had left Burminster, Loder, undoubtedly, would have told him to write a story recording his own personal feelings!

"Coffee, sir?" asked the waiter when he had returned to the dining-room.

"No, thank you—I haven't time."

He was out in the street a couple of minutes later.

Whom should he see? The Musgraves? The shop was only a quarter of a mile away. He could imagine how fiercely this petty provincial snob was resenting the blazing publicity which was now beating about him as the brother-in-law of Maud Slaney, suspected murderer! That button of a mouth would contort itself into a hundred different shapes, all disdainful; that fluty voice would rise to a scream of protest.

And his wife—what would be her attitude? She would probably refuse to talk at all, or if she did, it would only be to supply a companion-piece to her husband. She would heap scorn, hatred and general contumely on her sister for the disgrace which the latter had brought on the family name. How vividly he could visualise it!

There remained the father and mother. Tom found himself genuinely dreading facing the Gorgon, however; Mrs. Latimer, with the inconsistency of her class, would almost inevitably put the blame for the present catastrophe on him. "If it hadn't been for you, etc., etc."

And, with that awful feeling inside him that possibly she was right—that if he had not returned Maud's letter unanswered she might never have married the egregious dentist—he found himself unable to face this ordeal.

Yet——

The next moment he was racing across the road: he might be mistaken, but he felt that that shambling figure, looking the personification of despair, was Edwin Latimer.

When he caught up with the man, he discovered that his surmise had been right.

"Mr. Latimer," he said quietly, catching hold of the other's arm.

The man turned and looked at him. To Tom's astonishment, it was not a resentful look. Surprise could be seen in it and, stranger still—pleasure! The father seemed almost as incalculable as the daughter.

"Why, it's Farrar—Tom Farrar, surely?" he exclaimed.

"Yes.....I want to talk to you. Where can we go? I'm staying over at the Crown: would you like to go there?"

Latimer negatived the proposal with a shake of his head.

"No—not the Crown," he replied; "they might turn me out. Besides, with these togs....." A second rueful smile accompanied the words. "Let's get up on the Common; there we can talk without people watching.....I'm tired of people watching," he finished, with a shudder that spoke of his suffering.

Tom lost no time. He signalled a passing taxi, and within ten minutes the two of them had arrived at the top of Hillcrest Road.

"I suppose you've come down to report this——?" said Latimer, failing at the last word of the sentence.

"Yes.....I was ordered down here: needless to say, I shouldn't have come on my own. I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Latimer—you believe that, I hope?"

The man shambling along by his side said:

"If I were a humbug like George Mungrove, I suppose I should refuse to believe you—but, as it is, I do. You know, Tom, I liked you on sight. It was a great pity that Maud and you——" He shook his head before continuing: "But that's all finished and done with—like me! I don't know what's going to happen to any of us. Of course, the trouble is to believe the poor girl's as guilty as I tell. Who would be married to a swine like that fellow Slaney?"

Tom kept silent. The man was
could not take an unfair advantage

over his surprise at this meeting, and when he was more normal, he would put the case straight to him.

"Don't talk any more yet; try to forget it for a few minutes"; he knew the words were banal and ridiculous, but he felt such sympathy for this man that his tongue was quicker than his reasoning.

It was not until they had reached the edge of the Medway Cliffs—one of the finest views in the country—that Tom allowed himself to speak again.

"I've got to write about this beastly business, because it's my b," he said, "but I want you to know, Mr. Latimer, that I hate writing it; and that I shall be as discreet as I possibly can. The best I can do, I feel, is to be as sympathetic as possible to you."

Edwin Latimer pulled out a packet of cheap cigarettes, and took one. It was characteristic of his mode of life that he did not think of offering another to his companion. Had he done so, Maud would have refused.

"I've got to get something off my chest," said his companion; and you are the only person I can tell. After Maud and I had that quarrel in your house the night before I left for London, I told myself I simply had to cut her out of my life. You see, I imagined I was very much in love with her—as I've no doubt I was—but couldn't stand the treatment she was giving me. I hate to have you tell you this, but I must do it because I feel it's necessary. That was not the first row we had had, and through no fault of mine: a few mornings before when I had gone up to the shop to see her, Maud had treated me like a pickpocket. Why did I behave like that?"

Latimer shook his head.

"I don't know, my boy...it was part of her nature, I suppose. She has a kink, I think...she could be as nice as possible one minute, and as hard as nails the next. But she was always my favourite child, and I shall stick to her through thick and thin, yes, right up to the end. The others talk about the disgrace; only think of how much I loved her, how proud I was of her; how proud I still am of her..."

There was something rather splendid in this declamation, and Tom felt warmed to the man.

"She liked you, too. You were the only one in the family she

had any use for," he replied.

"Yes," mused Latimer, "Maud and I had a lot in common—we never fell out. Perhaps we understood each other better than the others. My poor, little girl..."

It was pitiable to see the man abandoning himself to such utter grief; heart-rending to hear his sobs. Tom put an arm round him as though he were a child.

"Don't mind me, old man," he said: "get rid of it, you'll feel better afterwards. And don't forget I'm your friend."

He was sincere: he now felt a personal sympathy with the man which was overwhelming, which made him feel that he would do anything for him. Anything at all. What had Latimer's life been?—and, good God, what was it now?

The paroxysm passed. Latimer, after drying his eyes on the cuff of his coat, relit the stub of his cheap cigarette and became almost normal.

"Thank you, Tom," he said, and now the reporter was able to remark that this man had something of the innate dignity which his daughter had shown in the dock at the Westminster Police Court that morning. It was a trace of race—race gone wrong, perhaps, but still something of the spirit as distinct from the flesh.

"I'm glad we've met, Tom," went on Latimer, "because, apart entirely from your kindness, and you don't know how much I appreciate that, my dear boy"—putting his hand on the other's for a moment—"I want to ask your advice. You see, this Defence of Maud is going to cost a lot of money. And, as you've probably guessed, I haven't a bean. Why," with a scornful laugh, "I don't earn enough some weeks to pay the butcher's bill! And to give Maud every chance—and damn it, she's got to have that!—I've got to engage a first-rate Counsel for her. That humbug Musgrave won't put up a penny. He's told me so. And I didn't know where else to turn. But this morning a letter came to the solicitor who is looking after Maud's interests for the time being—well, you'd better read it for yourself." He pulled an envelope out of his pocket.

Tom had been long enough in Fleet Street not to be surprised by the contents of that epistle, strange as it might have appeared to the ordinary person.

It was marked "Confiden!"

entirely re-written in the office, and distorted out of all recognition. That maudlin muck about the father made him feel sick. The story he had sent had been sincere and straightforward; this was bilge. Thank God, they hadn't put his name to it. This meant that they weren't pleased; well, he couldn't help that—if Loder wanted slush he'd have to send somebody else down—preferably a woman sob-writer—to take over: the prospect of handling the Slaney Murder Trial was sickening in more ways than one.

IV

Some of these thoughts came winging back as he waited the grim Assize proceedings to start. He had not seen any other member of the Latimer family except Maud's father, during intervening fortnight, but an extraordinary letter written by Musgrave had been sent on to him by Loder. In this letter Musgrave had protested to the *Daily Banner* against their going in sending down to Burminster a reporter "who was bound to be prejudiced against my poor, unfortunate sister because she was formerly very friendly with him before they quarrelled."

Loder had enclosed a covering note:

Dear Farrar, —

Why didn't you tell me you knew Mrs. Slaney? I should have given you notice of this letter (which is so much eye-wash, of course) and send a Leader-page article to-night, giving a character-sketch of the accused woman. "Maud Slaney: By An Intimate Friend."

Yours faithfully,
Graham Loder

He had refused to consider the proposal at first—rather resign, he told himself—but habit made him sit down at his typewriter, and before he realized exactly what he was doing, the first paragraph had been composed.

The article, written in a sympathetic tone, without any bitterness, set out all the accused woman's good points, and her bad. Tom had had to rely upon his imagination to fill out the extent, of course, but he felt he owed his former sister a concession. She might be a cold-blooded murderer.

to her own father she was—but she had not been declared guilty yet; and he felt she ought to be given every chance of enlisting the public's sympathy.

And Slaney, he was certain, must have used some unfair means to get her consent to his proposal of marriage. Even though the dentist was dead, he could not conquer his dislike of the man.

"It's going to be a pretty good Trial, don't you think?" drawled a voice—a feminine voice—on his left.

He turned out of politeness to see a small, overdressed woman of twenty-five or so, and became immediately conscious of certain facts, in the order named: (a) that she was one of those unfortunate females to whom certain of the more distasteful advertisements in the public prints were directed; (b) that she had the hard, repellent expression of practically every Fleet Street woman he had so far met; and (c) that her blood-red nails gave him an additional qualmish feeling.

His reply was short.

"I should say it has every element of popular success," he replied.

How appalling the whole thing was! He supposed he would have had a different viewpoint if he had been a person entirely detached; but the sight he had recently caught of that dense crowd panting to get inside the Court had nauseated him. Avid-eyed, loose-lipped, looking more like ravening beasts, lusting for the kill, than normal, self-respecting men and women, they had surged against the policemen guarding the doors time after time. Hating to be thwarted of their desire—the desire to look upon two fellow-human creatures exposed to smearing shame—they had taken this baulking of their wishes in bad part, muttering threats against the constables who looked upon them with the impersonal regard of animals in cages.

Animals in cages! As the words formed themselves in the reporter's brain, Tom thought of the moment when the girl he had once loved would shortly be herself an animal in a cage—a cage that might prove to be the very threshold of dreadful death.....

"I say, can't you hear? I've been speaking to you for the past minute, but you haven't been paying any attention." The sister on his left was nudging his elbow. "What's

with you, anyway?"

Tom forced himself to face the Three Unpleasant Facts.

"My dear girl, I was merely considering how completely filthy the average human being is!" he said coldly.

"Does that include yourself?"

"Naturally."

"Little boy," was the equally acrid comment, "you're much too young to be cynical.....my God! here they are!"

Tom was never to forget that moment. The many-headed many-eyed monster represented by the Public in that crowded fetid Court of Criminal Law, was now able to satisfy its devouring curiosity: it was free to gaze its fill upon the man and woman in the dock.

The two made a striking contrast: the apparently strong had become the weak, the seemingly weak had found an unsuspected strength.

The woman first: Maud Slaney was "neatly and becomingly dressed" (as the Press reports later stated) in a black frock, with lace at the wrists and throat. On her head was a small, black hat which set off to advantage her beautiful hair and well shaped head. Beyond possibly a little lipstick, and this redness of lips might have been caused by entirely natural means, there was no trace of make-up on her face.

But it was not the accused woman's physical appearance that was striking as this was, which caused instant widespread comment (as much amongst the occupants of the reporters' seats as with the members of the public), it was the mental attitude of Maud Slaney that arrested general attention.

The accused woman looked the calmest person in the Court. And this tranquillity, so unnatural in the circumstances, was due, one felt, to any brazen quality in the woman, but to an inward power or force which sustained her in this awful hour. She might have been the guest of honour at some party which slightly bored her, but which she was determined to see through if only for appearances' sake. In a word, she commanded respect: she did not appear as though she wanted anyone's sympathy. She was above that; that inward force sustained her.

The man was a very different picture. Where was the virile masculinity of that sexual go-getter, Basil Leadbeater, now? Where was the he-man strength? Where the almost brutal

hard of everyone's feelings that had previously upheld him in his purposeful and callous stride through Life?

The fellow—to those who knew him, and there were several of these in the Court—seemed to have shrunk. He crouched instead of stood upright; his huge hands, the knuckles showing white, as they gripped the rail of the dock in front, alone prevented him from falling. He looked like a beast brought to bay—and it was not a pleasant sight. The man's face was pasty: a dirty grey; his features twisted, and every so often his tongue licked his lips as though the latter were unnaturally dry. Horrible.

The two prisoners had a warder seated between them.

What did this mean?... Did they expect trouble between Mrs. Slaney and Leadbeater?..... Had the lovers, now that the Ultimate had been reached, found Hatred taking the place of Lust? Tom, looking round the Court, could see the heads of the Public being placed close together; could imagine the fevered whispers that were being exchanged.

"I'm from the *Sunday Recorder*; I'm writing Slaney's Life Story now," came from the sob-sister on his left as Tom rose with the rest of the Court to mark the entrance of the Judge. The latter, Mr. Justice McMichael, a portly man of sixty-five, waddled to his dais, bowed to the jury, and then sat heavily down.

The show was due to begin.....

V

Mr. Simon Hoare, K.C., adjusted the sleeves of his gown, took off his reading glasses, waved them in the air (a favourite preliminary mannerism of his), and began to speak in a harsh, compelling voice. Rumour said that this celebrated prosecutor actually found pleasure in hounding his victims to the gallows; certainly, a killer, once he or she was brought to trial, rarely succeeded in escaping him.

"May it please your lordship, members of the jury" (he started), "now that your lordship has decided—and may I say, very respectfully, most properly decided—that the two prisoners should be tried together, let me explain the circumstances which have brought them to this place.

It was not a very expensive shop—by that, I mean that the proprietress, who styled herself 'Madame Harting', was in the habit of catering for that class of the community who either could not, or were not prepared, to pay more than a very few guineas for their clothes.

"I shall not be accused of any disrespect to the dead, I hope; when I say that Oswald Slaney, the man Maud Latimer married, could not be described as a romantic figure. He was fifty years of age at the time of his marriage, but looked much older. He was precise, indeed finicky, in many of his ways; he was set in his habits and suffered from a number of minor physical ailments which were scarcely likely to endear him to a girl less than half his age. It is a small point, perhaps, but I consider it worth mentioning at this moment; Oswald Slaney wore elastic stockings on both legs because of varicose veins. He also suffered more or less habitually from nasal catarrh.

"Why did Maud Latimer, who, as you can all see, is a most attractive young woman, marry this Oswald Slaney? Whilst the mind of a woman is so often incalculable, there does seem a mystery here. It is almost impossible to believe that she could have loved this man who, as I have already stated, was anything but a romantic figure.

"Then, if it was not Love, what was the guiding motive at the back of her mind when she accepted Oswald Slaney's offer of marriage? I suggest that she 'had an eye'—as the phrase has it—'for the main chance.' In other words, that she married Oswald Slaney for his money, and perhaps for social position. This fact should be borne in mind.

"For this unfortunate man, having been a bachelor up to the age of fifty years, and having been assiduous and skilful in the practice of his profession, and having been, moreover, always careful in monetary matters, was a fairly prosperous member of the community: apart from the practice at Repton Road, which he recently purchased, he had a matter of something over twenty thousand pounds securely invested."

The speaker paused to sip from a glass of water. His voice up to now disagreeable to the ear, became more unpleasant as he proceeded.

"Maud Slaney—this former *venduse* of cheap d not find romance with her husband but she found it

And it will be a pleasure !

Yours ever,

Basil L."

Pausing again (Simon Hoare knew well how to round off his periods and to give every chance to the high-lights of his opening addresses), the Crown Counsel allowed the words and their import to sink into the minds of all who had heard them.

"I do not suppose" (he continued) "that any person of normal intelligence or knowledge of the world will not be able to form his or her own opinion on the letter which I have just read. I submit that, taking all the circumstances into consideration, it is one of the most disquieting documents ever penned. And one of the most damning. For consider the phrase 'when we were having that romp together.' Does it require any elucidation on my part to explain what the word 'romp' meant? I think not. And then consider, again, the phrase which follows immediately afterwards: 'I suppose Old Slaney would have spat blood...I know I should have if I had been in his place.' Leadbeater is referring then, let me remind you, to the employer from whom he was gaining his living and whose trust he was so basely abusing.

"Nauseating as the knowledge must be to every decent and normal-minded person, the concluding words of that abominable letter (one of many such which were found, all in Leadbeater's handwriting and addressed to the female prisoner) can only mean one thing. I must be blunt, since bluntness is called for: Mrs. Slaney was evidently a woman of strong sexual passions. Either because her husband was not capable of satisfying this incessant demand, or because she had formed a physical repugnance for him, she turned elsewhere—to the man who is now by her side in the dock, jointly charged with her in this gravest of all crimes.

"The case for the Crown, which it is my painful duty to present to you, is not based upon surmise, nor is it based upon the letters which passed between the male and the female prisoners. I shall call as a witness Miss Grace Mapleton, a young woman who was employed by Mr. Slaney as a receptionist. Miss Mapleton will tell you during the course of her evidence that she was fully aware of the guilt between the two prisoners. She will g

"The plain facts are that, according to the most expert medical testimony, Oswald Slaney was killed by means of a deadly drug called strychnine; that the administration of this drug would have been a comparatively simple matter to accomplish by either of the prisoners; that no one apart from Mrs. Slaney had ever heard the dead man once hint that he contemplated taking his life; that the prisoners, both jointly and separately, had reason to wish this unfortunate man dead—and that no one, apart from Leadbeater and Mrs. Slaney, were in the position to kill him by this particular means.

"Finally, it will be my duty to ask you, after you have heard all the evidence, and are satisfied that the two prisoners did conspire together and, as a result, did actually murder Oswald Slaney by means of poison, to declare them both guilty of this fiendish crime."

With these concluding words, uttered in a chilling tone, the Prosecuting Counsel sat down.

Excited murmurings broke from the crowd. These were instantly suppressed by the Court Usher; but, although they could not talk, the Public could think. And the result of their thought was that this girl with the astonishing poise was undoubtedly guilty. It was morbidly fascinating to think of the hangman's rope encircling that white column of a throat.

VI

Tom, all the time he was scribbling his notes to be elaborated in the descriptive sketch he was due to write of the day's proceedings, wondered what Maud Latimer was thinking. Watching her intently during the time that Simon Hoare, K.C., was making his damaging opening statement, he did not see her once change colour or give any sign of perturbation. Although she was concerned more intimately with the proceedings than anyone present (her fellow-prisoner excepted), she appeared to be coolly aloof. It was not that she was not interested; she followed the Prosecuting Counsel's speech, Tom could see, with alert intelligence, but her words seemed to leave her indifferent. It was as though she considered herself above such common and sordid al-

It was her sense of eg-
armour.

He was right.

Maud Latimer's thoughts had been—

"I mustn't allow anyone to see that I am affected. It will look bad if I do; they will think I am guilty. I have always believed myself to be a great character; now I have the chance of proving it.....Yes, I killed Oswald Slaney, I killed him with the strychnine which Basil Leadbeater told me about, and which I took from the locked drugs-cupboard in the surgery. I killed Slaney because I hated him more than I would have thought any one human being could possibly hate another. I hated him from the first time I saw him—and I got to hate him more every day.

"Why did I marry him? I suppose everybody in the Court is asking that question. Was it because of his money? No, not altogether. I married him because, for the first and last time in my life, I was afraid. (I shall never be afraid again: even if they hang me—which they won't, because I have a trump-card left which I shall play at the right moment—nobody shall see me flinch or moan.) What I did I did knowingly, willingly, gladly. I would do it again. And having done it, I cured myself of Fear. Leadbeater was panic-stricken; he's trembling now; it makes me sick to see a great brute like that AFRAID! Well, perhaps he will have something of which to be really afraid before the Trial is over. We shall see. One thing certain is that I'm going to look after myself now. If it's got to be a case of sacrifice, he, as a man, must do the sacrificing.....And if he doesn't.....

"Yes. I killed Slaney. I had to do it. He got so badly on my nerves. He must have known, the fool, that I had nothing but contempt for him, that I hated every inch of him. But what he didn't know, and this was where I think I was clever, was why I agreed to marry him. I had to have a father—a legitimate father, I mean—for my child.

"Good Heavens, it's funny now, looking back on those days. I thought I had been trapped! It was that fellow Zeitun, the dirty hound, who did it. When I went to him the second time—that was the same night as Slaney proposed—he told me definitely that I was going to have a baby; that I was two months gone. Why the devil should he have lied to me I don't know

example of what happens to a woman who is thoroughly depraved. Wanton adulteress and murderess—that's me. It sounds odd, especially when I think that only ten months ago I hadn't allowed anybody to touch me—and that I had to go on my knees almost to get a man to seduce me!

"I'm not making any excuses to myself for what I've done. When Tom Farrar disappointed me as a lover, I swore I'd find a man who could play Potemkin to my Queen Catherine—and I didn't have to look very far for him, either. I found him on my own doorstep; right inside my own husband's surgery, as a matter of fact! I had been starved for so long, had restrained myself so much that now I knew I really had what that Crown Prosecutor fool called 'strong sexual passions,' I just let myself go. A woman's nature is very complex; I really believe one reason why I wallowed in the mud with Leadbeater—and we certainly did wallow!—was because I wanted to get my own back on Tom Farrar and Slaney—especially Slaney, whose fumbleries were not only grotesque but to me—obscene. It wasn't that I loved Leadbeater; good heavens, no! He merely served the purpose I wanted him to serve. I had to lead him towards the end.

"I'm up a creek at it now, at least, most women would consider themselves properly at it, I suppose. The average woman would be terror-stricken, thinking what might be going to happen to her. But I'm not the ordinary woman. I am Maud Latimer. And that makes all the difference. They won't see me squealing; what I feel is I've been flushed into this mess, but I'm going to get out of it all right. If I weren't Maud Latimer it would be different; but I owe a duty to myself. If anybody thinks I'm going to allow myself to be hanged, they're very much mistaken. I've got to look after myself: I'm only twenty-four; I have a whole life in front of me, and I'm going to make the most of it.

"Besides, that Sunday newspaper, the one that's paying for my defence, evidently thinks I'm an important person. Oh, yes, I'm going to live all right. I'm not worrying about that. Haven't I got that trump-card left if the worst comes to the worst?

"Funny that Tom Farrar should be here, reporting this Trial. It doesn't seem so very long ago that I was up in my stuffy room at home (Ashburton Gardens, I mean) dreaming

of the day when I should be a great person, with all the world reading about me. Strange that it should have happened—stranger still, perhaps, that the possibility of Tom coming to interview me for his paper has happened. He won't be able to, I suppose, until I am acquitted—AS I SHALL BE—but then he'll have to come; all the reporters will be ordered to. What will we talk about, I wonder?... He looks much older; much more of a man. I wonder if he is any better as a lover? .. Perhaps, I may ...

"But that must wait; I've got to see this beastly Trial through first. How many days will it last, I wonder? It's a terrible nuisance. And yet I mustn't forget that it was through this Trial that I became famous; achieved greatness; and got into the newspapers. What was it the Daily Banner, Tom Farrar's own newspaper, had called me? 'The Most Beautiful Woman in Burminster', wasn't it? I'm not supposed to see any papers, but Father—dear old Dad—brought me in the cutting. Into prison!—fancy me—Maud Latimer!—being in prison!..... How funny the Judge looks perched up there! And he keeps looking at me—why? Anyone would think a man in his position would have better manners .. Don't judges put on funny black caps when they pronounce the sentence of Death? ...I've read about it somewhere. Well, he needn't bother to bring his alongAt least, not so far as I'm concerned.....

"What a crowd! If I was the nervous type, they might frighten me. Staring like that. As it is, it is almost amusing to see them so excited."...

These had been Maud Latimer's thoughts during the opening statement by the Crown Prosecutor.

VII

And these were the thoughts of some other people, in the order named—

Tom Farrar: "It's so amazing, I still cannot believe it..... that the girl I used to love, the girl who only eight months ago meant almost the whole world to me, is being charged with murder!...and that she probably did it, too!...It makes me sick to think of her and that fellow in the dock...But more than anything else, it's her self-possession that's staggering—yes, I'd better make that the key-note of it

The Judge: "How damnable to be seventy! One cannot hope to enjoy the favours of beautiful young women like this Slaney prisoner at such an age. They just laugh at you.....no matter how much money you spend on them. Besides, the power has gone; I'm no good. Even that stuff which old Gascoigne of Harley Street gave me doesn't work now.....But what a devilishly attractive creature this Slaney girl is! I'd give half my first year's pension to have her to myself—entirely to myself—for a couple of hours. She must be as hot as Hell..... And just for Sex, too; no question of any damned silly love-nonsense about it; otherwise, she wouldn't have chosen the Leadbeater brute... What a horrible sight the fellow is—he's as scared as the Devil, of course—whereas the woman..... Damn it, whatever the evidence is, and the case looks pretty bad already, I can't hang a woman.Yes, yes, I know, but Shearman ought to have had more respect for the proprieties in the Mrs. Thompson case. An old cow who is an affront to the eyes, perhaps, but not a glorious creature like this Slaney beauty, who makes a man's mouth water just to look at her. Thank Heaven, she has Morrison Bent defending her; he can be relied upon to tear the hearts of the jury. A masterpiece, Bent; ought to have been an actor, doesn't he give a word he says, of course—tells you so quite frankly, and yet can bring tears to his own eyes just when he knows they are needed. He's like that crook Bottomley, I can tell you; but God as much as I like him, he's about as big a blackguard as I've been myself, but he does get his clients off, and I hope to God he'll get this girl off. I must be true to my oath, of course—yes, yes, I understand that—but if there is anything I can do...By God! she is a lovely creature."

Sir Morrison Bent, K.C.: "I'm glad I took this case, for it might have been made for me. Here I have all the elements I want for a spectacular triumph—with, above everything, a lovely woman accused of an abominable crime...Of course, the attitude I have resolved to take up in this case is to depict my innocent client to these fools of the jury—thank God, there are ten men and two women!—as a much maligned creature, and the victim of a lecherous, sadistic husband. (I must be careful not to lay it on too thick, however, that would be dangerous.) A

man with my reputation doesn't need notoriety, of course, but this is going to be an extremely sensational case—that was the chief reason I accepted the brief—and all publicity of this kind is good. Besides, I'm up against Simon Hoare again and the newspaper reporters expect the fur to fly whenever we are in court together. That again is good professional publicity.

"Is this Slaney girl guilty? She says she isn't—but I shouldn't be surprised if she is; all the evidence points that way, and my experience is that the type of woman who is carrying on the sort of intrigue she was having with the fellow Leadbeater will stop at nothing. She doesn't stop to count the cost, or to reckon with the risk...But that is just the sort of fight I like; when the odds are against me, I am always at my best...The Temple has always said that I will not scruple to try any trick in order to get a client off, and they're right! Certainly, I'm not going to stop at anything to get this girl free...I think I shall have the Judge on my side—that hoary old sinner, McMichael, can't resist a pretty face even at his age! I bet I know what's going through his mind now...! When I first took up criminal work—dear me, how many years is that ago now?—people said that I was a fool; that I should have gone into another branch of pleading, but what man with my temperament would change places with me to-day? I know I wouldn't!...Yes, it's going to be a glorious case and I shall win! Yes, I shall win!"

Basil Leadbeater: "Oh, God, what a mess I'm in! When I started this thing, I thought it was going to be all right—just a few weeks of excitement and then, if she got tired and told her husband (I was quite expecting her to do that!) I could clear off and get another job. I suppose I was mad to start it—but what fellow could have resisted? She's the type of woman to drive you crazy!...But she's a cold-blooded bitch. You can tell that just by looking at her. I knew it after the first time; she was just using me for her own ends. There wasn't any affection there; she's just sex-crazy. I didn't mind that; there was much love on my side, if the truth was told. But...now Somehow I feel she's going to let me down; to think only of herself. And, good God, I'm innocent! I never touched the stethoscope; I didn't even know she knew anything about the stethoscope. She'd been nosing about in Slaney's surgery, I suppose; read

of life as well as his state of health?"

The witness coughed in the deprecatory manner of the self-important man.

"I think I can say 'Yes' to that."

"Very well. Had you been attending Mr. Slaney before the night of the tragedy?"

Dr. Trevor consulted some notes he held in his hands.

"Mr. Slaney asked me to look in one night about a fortnight before."

"Did he wish to consult you about his health?"

"He did. He complained of suffering from indigestion."

At this point His Lordship leaned forward.

"Was he subject to indigestion in any form, Doctor Trevor?"

The witness turned towards the dais with every evidence of respect.

"Yes, my lord. Mr. Slaney was not a strong man, and amongst his minor infirmities must be included a weak stomach."

Counsel for the Crown seized on the point.

"I notice you use the term 'Minor infirmities,' Doctor: may I ask if you had any reason to fear that Mr. Slaney was not long for this life?"

The witness shook his head vigorously.

"Certainly not! If I had been examining Mr. Slaney for life insurance, I would have been willing to say that he was good for another twenty years, always providing, of course, that he took reasonable care of himself."

"And did he take reasonable care of himself?"

"Most decidedly. He was in every sense of the word a most temperate man."

A smothered giggle came from the public gallery, but whether this was directed at the witness himself or at the picture he had drawn of his "patient and friend" was immaterial. The unseemly disturbance was quickly hushed, at the stern rebuke of the Judge who said that if there was any further behaviour of that kind, he would have the gallery cleared.

The examination proceeded:

"As both the friend and the medical adviser of Mr. Slaney, you had met his wife, Doctor?"

"I had." The witness's tight-lipped mouth became even more prim.

"And you knew, of course, the prisoner Leadbeater?"

"I did."

Dr. Wilby Trevor, M. D., L.R.C.P., was looking by the time as though he had a bad smell under his nose. Either then or he was beginning to feel the strain of the occasion.

"We will now come to the night of the tragedy, Doctor. Please tell the Court in your own words exactly what happened so far as you yourself were concerned."

Dr. Trevor cleared his throat.

"I received a telephone call from Mrs. Slaney at 9.25 on the evening of the 4th of March. Mrs. Slaney said that her husband had been taken suddenly ill, that it seemed serious, and asked me if I could come along at once. I arrived at the house within five minutes, and found Mr. Slaney lying on a couch. His condition, I could see at a glance, was very grave. I decided almost immediately that by some means he must have taken poison of the strychnine group."

"You will, of course, give us your reasons why you came to that conclusion, Doctor?" This from the Judge.

"Certainly, my lord. May I do so now?"

Doctor," he commented briefly.

Counsel for the Prosecution resumed his examination.

"From the moment you arrived in the house until death came, what length of time elapsed, Doctor?"

"Roughly about twenty minutes."

"You remained with the patient during that time?"

"I did."

"Was Mrs. Slaney there?"

"She was."

"Doing what she could?"

"She did what I asked her to do," was the tight-lipped reply.

"Did she seem upset?"

"Reasonably so."

"Did she strike you as a woman who was overcome with grief?"

"She did not."

"On the other hand, did she display a certain callousness?"

The witness paused before he answered.

"I should rather describe Mrs. Slaney as being remarkably self-possessed," was his reply.

"She was a witness to her husband's agony?"

"For most of the time."

Mr. Simon Hoare, K. C., allowed this information to sink into the minds of the Court by holding a whispered consultation with his junior. Then, as though gaining fresh strength, he proceeded.

"You did not give a death certificate, Doctor?" he asked in a casual tone.

"No." The monosyllable was emphatic.

"Please tell His Lordship and the members of the jury why you did not comply with that formality?"

The witness cleared his throat once again.

"For the very good reason that, directly I saw the patient, I came to the conclusion that something was very wrong."

"In a word, Doctor, you decided that the patient had taken into his system by some means a deadly poison?"

"That is correct."

"Did you consider by any chance the possibility that Mr Slaney had tried to commit suicide?"

"Do you happen to know if Mr. Slaney was in the habit of occasionally taking a glass of Guinness's stout with his evening meal?"

"Yes. He did so under my instructions."

"Assuming that a person desired to poison another, would a glass of stout be a good medium in which to introduce strychnine?"

"It would."

"Why do you say that, Doctor?"

"Because the natural flavour of the stout would take away to a great extent the extremely bitter taste of strychnine."

"Do you happen to know, Doctor, if Mr. Slaney did actually take a glass of stout that night?"

"I asked Mrs. Slaney what he had taken within the past hour, and she told me that he had had a light meal of boiled fish, potatoes and milk pudding."

"Any stout?"

"Yes. Mrs. Slaney informed me that, as had been his custom for the past few evenings, her husband had drunk a glass of stout that night."

"Did you attach any importance to that last remark?"

"I did."

"And did you take any action in the matter?"

"Yes. I asked Mrs. Slaney if I could see the glass in which the stout had been contained."

"What did she say?"

"She appeared confused, but later replied that she was sorry that she had washed the glass out herself in the kitchen and that he could not bear the smell."

"One final question, Doctor: taking all the circumstances into consideration, did you regard that reply of Mrs. Slaney's as being of any significance?"

"I regarded it as being of the highest significance."

"That is all, thank you, Doctor." Counsel for the Crown sat down.

With ponderous dignity—he was a fine figure of a man—Sir Morrison Bent, K.C., rose to cross-examine. He looked at the somewhat insignificant figure of the witness, and then said in a loud, challenging voice: "I've heard the evidence you have just given, Doctor, and I want to put one question to you straight

away. It is this: Why did you dislike Mrs. Slaney?"

The witness's pale face reddened.

"I'm afraid I don't understand you, Sir."

"Yet I think I have made my question quite clear: I will repeat it: Why did you dislike Mrs. Slaney?"

"I was unaware that I did dislike her."

"You swear to that?"

The witness hesitated.

"Remember you are on your oath, Doctor," persisted Counsel.

"I realize that. You need not remind me. If you persist in my giving an answer to your question, I can only say that I considered the marriage from the beginning most unsuitable."

"In what way, may I ask?"

"Well, here was a man of fifty—and from a health point of view, several years older than that—who takes as his wife a young, pleasure-loving girl of twenty-four. The two had nothing in common."

"Was it for you to pass such a comment?"

"You asked me for my opinion—I've given it to you."

"And so it was because of the disparity in their ages that you disliked Mrs. Slaney?"

"I haven't admitted that I did dislike her—I merely said that I considered the marriage was unsuitable."

"Very well. Now you told my learned friend that you were not only the medical adviser of Mr. Slaney but also his personal friend. Is that true?"

"Yes; I've known Oswald Slaney ever since he came to Burminster——"

"Which was only a few months ago, I understand?" swiftly interposed the Counsel.

"Some friendships ripen quickly—ours did."

The little man was standing up well to the great K.C. The crowded Court showed their appreciation by a subdued murmuring, which was instantly crushed by the Court Usher.

The cross-examination proceeded:

"Did you, in your capacity as a personal friend of Mr. Slaney, have any opportunity of seeing how this marriage, which you have commented upon with such bitterness, worked out?"

"I knew that my friend was unhappy almost from the beginning."

"Can you give the Court any reasons for that statement?"

"Yes. It all comes back to what I said before—these two people were unsuited to each other. I was surprised at a man like Oswald Slaney getting married at all."

"And your reasons?"

"He was the pronounced bachelor type. He had been perfectly comfortable as a bachelor, but became unhappy directly he was married."

"Are you suggesting, Doctor, that Mrs. Slaney was responsible for this unhappiness—that she did not do her duty by him?"

"I am saying from both my experience as a medical man and from my own observations that she was a totally unsuitable wife for my friend, Oswald Slaney."

Although the K.C. persisted in this line of cross-examination he was not able to shake the witness's mind on this particular point.

Sir Morrison Bent tacked.

"There were quarrels between them, I believe?"

"I understand so."

"Mr. Slaney told you about them, no doubt?"

"Yes.....he did." The admission was made with reluctance.

"Do you happen to know how these quarrels originated?"

No answer.

"You must answer Counsel's questions, Doctor,"

Judge, looking sternly at the witness.

"Were not these quarrels almost invariably started by Slaney?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Not to your knowledge?" repeated Counsel with show of contempt. "Were you not aware, for example, of a young and inexperienced wife was driven almost out of the house by the constant nagging attacks made upon her by her husband?—this invalidish bachelor, who should not have been married—I am quoting your own words—and that in consequence, became almost unbearable for her?"

The witness tossed his head.

"I was certainly not aware of such a state of affairs."

"You say that on your oath?"

"I say it on my oath."

"You were not aware, perhaps, that Mr. Slaney was insufferably jealous of his wife?"

"He may have had reason for such suspicion," was the dryly-uttered reply.

"Answer my question, sir—'yes' or 'no'!" thundered Counsel; "and please do not make any comments of your own. They are not required."

"Very well. I will try to remember."

"You did not know, perhaps," persisted Counsel, "that Mr. Slaney kept his wife short of a reasonable amount of house-keeping money?"

"I did not."

"Did you know that he was always complaining about the state of his health?"

"It's news to me."

"Yet he was the neurotic type, was he not?"

"To a certain extent."

"In other words, he was not entirely normal?"

The fresh question appeared to startle the witness, as it startled a good many other people in Court.

"'Entirely normal'? Before I can answer that, I must have a clearer definition of what is in your mind, Sir Morrison."

"I will tell you; you said just now that in your opinion Oswald Slaney was not the type of man to have got married. I believe that is so?"

Looking as though he was afraid that he was being trapped into an admission for which he would afterwards be sorry, the witness hesitated.

"Yes, I did say that," Dr. Trevor replied after this pause.

"Will you please tell the Court exactly why you came to that conclusion?"

"I think I have already done so, Sir Morrison. I said in reply to Mr. Hoare that Mr. Slaney was definitely of the bachelor type. He had grown accustomed to single life, and was fixed in his habits."

The famous Counsel made a dramatic pause.

"Were there any other reasons to suggest that this unfortunate man announced he then asked.

The witness flushed.

"None whatever," he replied sharply:

Sir Morrison Bent persisted.

"I must ask you this question, Doctor: was Oswald Slaney an entirely normal person from a sex-point of view?"

The flush in the doctor's face deepened.

"So far as I know, he was entirely normal."

"Very well. I will leave the point." Counsel for the woman-prisoner consulted his notes.

"Now, Doctor, let us consider something else: Mrs. Slaney did not consult you professionally, I understand?"

An expression of distaste passed over the witness's face.

"She did not."

"Was her health, so far as you could tell from visiting the house, good?"

"I believe so—it was a matter that did not greatly interest me." The hostility in the witness's voice was marked.

"But you would have attended her had she wished to consult you?"

"I should have had no alternative."

"You visited the house as a friend as well as a medical man, you have told the Court."

"That is so."

"Consequently, you had plenty of opportunity to form your own opinion of Mrs. Slaney. Would you have called her a happy woman?"

"What woman is happy?" The tart rejoinder, uttered in so unexpectedly a cynical tone, elicited a scream of raucous laughter from the Public Gallery.

The Judge frowned heavily.

"If there is any more of this unseemly behaviour, I will have the Court cleared," he said, glaring up at the occupants of the gallery. "You can proceed, Sir Morrison."

"Thank you, m'lud.....To resume, Doctor," the Counsel said, turning to the witness again, "granting that many women appear to find pleasure in being dissatisfied with their lives, you surely can give me a straightforward 'yes' or 'no' to my previous question? What I want to know is this: in your opinion, was Mrs. Slaney a happily-married woman?"

The witness replied with evident reluctance.

"She had everything she could wish for, in my opinion," said at length.

The Judge interrupted.

"That is not the way to reply to Counsel's questions, witness. Please give a direct answer to his enquiry."

The slight figure of Dr. Trevor seemed to shrink.

"I am sorry, my lord." He swung round to Sir Morrison Bent.

"If I have to give a considered 'yes' or 'no,' I should say that Mrs. Slaney was not a happily-married woman."

"Thank you." There was more than a hint of sarcasm in the acknowledgment. "To what special cause do you attribute Mrs. Slaney's unhappiness, Doctor?"

"I am not prepared to say."

"Does that mean you won't say?"

"No. It simply means that I was not sufficiently intimate with Mrs. Slaney to be able to give you a correct reply."

"I'll put it this way, then: could you imagine a young woman of Mrs. Slaney's type being happily married to her husband?"

"She could have been happy, had she wished—at least, that is my opinion."

Just when the keenly-listening spectators anticipated that the famous Counsel would continue to press this point, he once again changed the direction of his attack.

"Whilst it is quite evident, Doctor, that you formed personal dislike to Mrs. Slaney, you will not deny, I suppose, that she was an intelligent woman?"

A thin smile twisted the witness's lips.

"I should say she was very intelligent," he replied acidly.

Morrison Bent seized on the words.

"So intelligent that you would be surprised at her committing such an abysmal folly as attempting to kill her husband by such crude means as strychnine poisoning?"

The words which struck most hearers with such force that they might have received a physical blow, caused the witness to clench the front of the box with his hands.

"I cannot answer that."

"Let me put it this way, then: would you, as a medical man, as a man of the world, and as a judge of human character, expect an intelligent woman, who has even an elementary knowledge of

the action of drugs, to use such an agent as strychnine, if she wished to kill her husband?"

"I shouldn't say so."

"Tell the Court your reasons, Doctor."

"Well, in the first place, the symptoms of strychnine poisoning are so unmistakable."

"And," broke in Counsel, seizing on the words, "a woman married to a dentist, a woman married to a man who uses strychnine in the course of his professional duties, would know all about those symptoms?"

"She might."

"We will presume she does—isn't it conceivable to you as a doctor that a potential murderess would consider strychnine the very last weapon to be employed by her?"

"I should have said so."

"One last question. Before you leave the witness-box, doctor, would you mind telling me the precise reason why you don't like Mrs. Slaney?"

"I didn't like Mrs. Slaney because I had formed the opinion, rightly or wrongly, that she was the last woman in the world my friend Slaney should have married, and that, consequently, he was making his life a hell on earth."

Counsel lifted his prominent eyebrows.

"Strong words, Doctor."

"Granted. But I consider myself justified in using them."

"That is purely your opinion."

"Admitted." But there could be no mistaking the depth of the speaker's feelings.

II

Directly Sir Morrison Bent sat down, Benjamin Casey, counsel for the male prisoner, rose languidly.

Benjamin Casey had a face that might have belonged to an Irish peasant, which was not surprising since his grandfather had actually been an Irish peasant. Gaunt, raw-boned, with a fascinatingly rich brogue, Casey had sometimes been likened to the late Sir Edward Carson, and he had much of the latter's will.

"Doctor," he started, "you have been good enough to tell my learned friends, Mr. Hoare and Sir Morrison Bent, of your

acquaintance with the Slaney household. You had opportunity, whilst visiting the house of the dead man, to form an estimate of the character of another person besides Mrs. Slaney. I refer to Mr. Leadbeater. Now tell me, Doctor, did the unfortunate Mr. Slaney ever discuss with you the male prisoner?"

"He brought him into the conversation sometimes."

"He brought him into the conversation sometimes...I see. Did he ever talk about Mr. Leadbeater's capabilities?"

"I always understood him to think that Mr. Leadbeater was capable assistant."

"He had no criticism of my client on the score of professional ability?"

"None whatever."

"Mr. Leadbeater, as a qualified dentist himself, would be aware, of course, of the symptoms of strychnine poisoning?"

"I presume so."

"One other question, Doctor: did you gather from Mr. Slaney that he had any suspicion concerning the relations of Mr. Leadbeater with Mrs. Slaney?"

"No."

"Thank you, Doctor." And Benjamin Casey, looking pleased with himself, sat down.

The next witness proved to be a short, full-figured young woman, neatly dressed and with a remarkable assurance of manner. She gave her age at 25, her name as Grace Mapleton, and her occupation as dentist's receptionist. She had acted in this capacity to the late Oswald Slaney.

Counsel for the Crown treated her with gloved hands; she was a valuable witness for the Prosecution.

"Now, Miss Mapleton," he said, after the first few preliminary questions had been asked and replied to, "occupying the position you did at Repton Road, you had ample opportunity for seeing what was going on. Isn't that so?"

The witness nodded.

"Yes."

"Am I correct in assuming that you were aware of the relations existing between the two prisoners?"

"I knew they were carrying-on," was the answer without a change of expression.

"You mean that these two people, the

were having a guilty liaison?"

"I mean that they were carrying-on."

"That, in short, they were lovers?"

"Some people, I suppose, would call them that."

The Court started to laugh, and even Mr. Simon Hoar briefly smiled.

"Very well," he commented, "they were 'carrying-on,' as you so graphically put it. Can you tell the Court why you came to the conclusion, Miss Mapleton, that Mrs. Slaney and her husband's assistant were 'carrying-on'?"

The witness thrust out her jaw pugnaciously.

"It was so obvious," she replied: "anybody could see what was happening; even the servants talked about it."

"Servants, we know, are apt to gossip with or even without foundation, Miss Mapleton, and I want your own information please: what support can you give the Court for your statement a few moments ago that the two prisoners were 'carrying-on'—or, in other words, flagrantly deceiving your late employer, Mr. Oswald Slaney?"

The receptionist rapped on the rail of the witness-box with the knuckles of her ungloved hand.

"I saw them kissing and cuddling many times," she replied uncompromisingly.

"Can you give me the exact dates on which you saw the prisoners 'kissing and cuddling'?"

"I'm afraid not: I don't keep a diary." And then, before the threatened laughter could develop: "But it was happening at the time—directly Mr. Slaney's back was turned. They made no bones about it. Besides—"

"Please go on, Miss Mapleton."

"Well, I was going to say that Mr. Leadbeater used to tell me about—things."

Someone in the Public Gallery gave a snort of raucous laughter.

"Turn that person out!" ordered the Judge sternly.

When public decorum had been restored: "Do you mean to say that the male prisoner gave you his confidence regarding the relations he had with Mrs. Slaney?" asked Counsel for the Crown.

"Yes, I do—he was that sort of man."

If the expulsion of the woman from the Public Gallery had not acted as a deterrent, there is no doubt that the reply of the witness would have elicited further coarse guffaws. As it was, the twittering of the spectators sounded like the humming of bees.

"Do I take it, Miss Mapleton, that the prisoner Leadbeater was the type of man who boasted of his conquests?"

"If you mean that he talked about the women he was carrying on with—yes."

"And he boasted about his affair with Mrs. Slaney?"

"I don't know that I should call it 'boasting'—but he certainly went into a lot of details."

This time, the public refused to control itself, and the dingy Court was engulfed in laughter: the ghouls were giving tongue.

Mr. Justice McMichael frowned heavily.

"I give the persons who have just indulged in an exhibition of lamentable taste a final warning," he said: "if there is any more of this disgraceful conduct, I will have the Court cleared of everybody except those directly concerned with the Trial. I would remind you"—here his eyes swept in contempt over the public seats—"that two persons are being tried for their lives. This is a Criminal Court of Justice and not a music-hall."

Dismayed now, afraid that they would be deprived of further instalments in this astonishing human drama ("Why, it's better than any play, isn't it, dear?"), the offenders took to heart the warning and remained comparatively silent throughout the rest of the day's proceedings.

Mr. Simon Hoare continued his examination.

"In your opinion, Miss Mapleton, did Mr. Slaney know what was going on?"

"If he didn't, he must have been blind."

"Did you know for certain that he was aware of this 'carrying-on,' as you call it?"

"I believe he did."

"Did he ever make any comment to you about it?"

"No—he wasn't the sort to talk much; besides, it was no business of mine."

"Quite so. I'll put it this way: did you notice in Mr. Slaney's manner after he was married?"

"He lost his temper pretty often."

"He lost his temper pretty often ! Was this, in your opinion, due to the unhappiness of his marriage ?"

"It may have been—who wouldn't have been unhappy with *that* going on ?"

"That is all, thank you, Miss Mapleton," and Counsel for the Crown sat down, looking pleased with himself.

Sir Morrison Bent rose like an actor taking an important cue.

"You had been on very friendly terms with Mr. Leadbeater yourself, I believe, Miss Mapleton ?"

The witness flushed, and looked angry.

"What do you mean by that ?" she countered fiercely.

"You heard my question."

"I refuse to answer it."

The Judge looked down at her.

"You must not be impertinent to learned Counsel ; and you must answer his question. Repeat it, please, Sir Morrison ?"

The sleek, handsome head ducked.

"Thank you, m'lud...Is it not a fact that you had been on very friendly terms with the male prisoner yourself ?" The question this time was shot venomously at the witness.

The receptionist flushed a deeper red.

"I was friendly with Mr. Leadbeater, certainly," she said, after a pause.

Sir Morrison Bent performed one of his favourite forensic tricks. He pointed his right forefinger menacingly at the witness.

"I must ask you not to trifle with the truth, Miss Mapleton," he said : "you are a person of intelligence ; you know what I mean. I ask you again : were you or were you not intimate with the male prisoner ?"

The receptionist seemed to be struggling for breath. Then she looked at the Judge.

"You must answer the question Counsel has put to you," said that dignitary.

There was a further struggle for breath.

"Yes, I was," then came the hurried reply ; "but what's it got to do with you ?" looking belligerently at her cross-examiner.

The Judge tapped on the desk before him.

"You must not be discourteous to learned Counsel," he said in rebuke ; "in future, please remember that you must confine your replies to answering his questions."

The girl in the witness-box looked sullen.

"All right," she replied.

Morrison Bent, having gained one point, endeavoured to secure another.

"Having admitted that you had intimate relations with the male prisoner, may I take it that you were jealous of Mrs. Slaney?"

She exploded.

"Certainly not!"

"I still put it to you that you were jealous of this woman who had taken your place? And that, consequently, you were almost insanely prejudiced against her?"

"Certainly not!" came the second reply.

"Do you tell me that you did not resent Mrs. Slaney capturing the affections of Mr. Leadbeater?"

"It was nothing to do with me; why should I care?"

"Answer my question, please."

"Then, no; I did not resent it."

"Had your relations with Mr. Leadbeater ceased?"

"Yes." Witness could be heard stamping her foot on the floor of the box. "I may like a bit of fun, but, thank God, I'm not a tart!" She followed up the retort by flashing a look of fierce hatred at the female prisoner.

"That's all, Miss Mapleton," said Sir Morrison Bent, bowing to her with almost old-world chivalry.

"You have been good enough, Miss Mapleton, to tell the Court about your relations with the male prisoner," drawled Benjamin Casey. "Now, I should like to ask you one question: is it, or is it not, a fact that Mr. Leadbeater was very attractive to the ladies?"

"He couldn't leave them alone, if that's what you mean."

"Quite so. Then it was no particular surprise to you to find him making love to Mrs. Slaney?"

"No surprise at all. Even before she was married, he was after her."

"That's all, thank you, Miss Mapleton," said Sir Morrison Bent, smiling at her.

The witness who had provided so much amusement for the avid Public then left the

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"He couldn't leave them alone, if that's what you mean."

"Quite so. Then it was no particular surprise to you to find him making love to Mrs. Slaney?"

"No surprise at all. Even before she was married, he was after her."

"That's all, thank you, Miss Mapleton," said the Irish smiling at her.

The witness who had provided so much rich evidence for the avid Public then left the box.

III

"Miss Primrose Slaney," called the Court Usher, and a woman of late middle-age, unattractive in appearance, and with *pince-nez* perched precariously on her thin, bridged nose, stepped forward and made her way towards the witness-box.

Determination was written in every step she took, as well as in the expression on her face. "I am going to see this thing through at all costs," was the obvious burden of her thoughts. She gripped her umbrella like a lethal weapon that she would have liked to plunge into the bodies of the two prisoners. This much was evident by the way she glared in the direction of the dock.

That such a woman should be called as an important witness in this sordid sex-drama was a screaming anomaly, for Miss Primrose Slaney evidently regarded sex, not merely as the deadliest of sins, but as a grave mistake on the part of the Creator.

Mr. Simon Hoare, knowing how important her evidence would prove, treated her carefully from the beginning.

"Your name is Primrose Slaney?" he started.

"It is."

"And you are the sister of the deceased?"

"The only sister."

"Is it true to say that you are the dead man's only living relative, Miss Slaney?"

"Yes."

"You live at Oxford, I believe, Miss Slaney?"

"Yes, in Woodstock Road."

"Were you on affectionate terms with your brother Oswald?"

The witness's already grim expression became almost menacing.

"We were deeply attached to each other."

"He was a good brother to you?"

"The best that ever lived."

"With regard to his general disposition, Miss Slaney, how would you describe your brother?"

"Apart from his goodness to me, he was the kindest of men."

"Generous?"

"Within reason."

"I must apologize for asking you this further question, Miss Slaney, but there has been a suggestion that there was an un-

pleasant side to your brother's character——"

He was not allowed to proceed any further.

"It's an outrageous lie," declared the witness; "my brother was entirely normal in every respect."

The Judge peered at her over his reading-glasses.

"So far as you know, Miss Slaney, I take it?" he said.

She accepted the amendment ungraciously.

"I knew my brother intimately, my lord; if there had been any unpleasant side to his character, it would have been revealed to me."

"Very well," replied the Judge, plainly unconvinced; "please proceed, Mr. Hoare."

"Is it true that you were surprised to know that your brother was getting married?"

"It came as a terrible shock to me."

"Can you tell me why?"

"Well, in the first place, I agree with what Doctor Trevor has already said: my brother was of the pronounced bachelor type, very fixed in his ways of life, and I was afraid that such a drastic change as marriage would," she gestured with her hands—"how can I put it?"

"Put him out of his stride, shall we say?" suggested Counsel.

"Yes." She nodded vigorously. "And then when I saw"—here her thin lips curled in utter contempt—"the person he had married——!"

"Let us take this calmly, Miss Slaney," said Counsel for the Crown. "You are a fair-minded woman, I hope?"

"I have always tried to be."

"Of course. And you are willing to admit, no doubt, that, like most sisters with a deep affection for a bachelor brother, you were prepared to be prejudiced against his wife?"

"Perhaps I was."

"But, loving your brother as you did, is it correct to say that you would have been perfectly willing to sink your personal feelings, if you had been assured of his happiness?"

"Yes, I should."

Counsel for the Crown plucked at the edges of his gown.

"When did you first meet your brother's wife?"

"Not until a month after he was married."

"Weren't you invited to the wedding?"

"I was not."

"Did you know that your brother contemplated getting married?"

"Not until after he *was* married."

"You say you had always been on terms of great affection together?"

"Yes, Oswald and I had always been very fond of each other."

"Then, can you account for your brother not taking you into his confidence about the marriage which he must have known would certainly be a great surprise, if not an actual shock, to you?"

"There was a reason—a very good reason," was the bitter comment.

"I must ask you to tell the Court that reason, Miss Slaney."

"It was because he was completely dominated by that woman!" And here she pointed a quivering hand at the female prisoner.

The Judge asserted himself.

"You must please control yourself, Miss Slaney; whilst I have every sympathy for you in this tragic affair, proper respect must be paid to the Court."

She lowered her head.

"I am very sorry, my lord——"

"That will do; please remember once again that you must control your feelings."

Mr. Simon Hoare took charge again after this brief interlude.

"It is your opinion, then, that it was due to the influence of the female prisoner over your brother, that you were not informed of his forthcoming marriage?"

"I am sure of it."

"Are you also sure that it was through the influence of Mrs. Slaney that you were not invited to the wedding?"

"Yes, I am sure of that, too."

"You have just told us that you did not meet your brother's wife until a month after the marriage. Would you please explain the circumstances of this meeting?"

The witness leaned over the side of the witness-box.

"You can imagine my consternation when I heard through the most unexpected source that my brother was married! I

immediately rang him up at Burminster, to see if this preposterous rumour were true."

"Did your brother answer the 'phone?"

"Not at first. I had the shock of my life when I heard a woman's voice declare that she was Mrs. Slaney—and did I have any message?"

"She probably took you for a patient."

"I don't know what she took me for," was the indignant response; "all I know is that I flatly refused to believe that she was 'Mrs. Slaney,' and I hung on until my brother himself came to the telephone. As a result of what he told me—he was very confused—I decided to go at once to Burminster and see for myself the exact state of affairs."

"And when you got to Burminster, you found that your brother was actually married?"

"I did, and to the last person in the world I should have chosen for him."

"You must confine yourself to my questions, Miss Slaney; otherwise, we shall be incurring his lordship's displeasure again. On what grounds did you consider Mrs. Slaney to be so unsuitable a wife for your brother?"

"Well, she was less than half his age, to begin with—and then—may I speak frankly?"

"Yes, so long as you confine yourself to answering my question."

"I thought she was flighty in disposition, almost completely uneducated, and, worst of all, though she had only been married to my brother a month, she already treated him with entire disrespect."

"What was your brother's attitude to this?"

"Poor man, he seemed utterly crushed. It was just as though he realized the awful mistake he had made."

"How long did you remain at Poplar Road, Burminster?"

"I had intended to stay a week, but the general atmosphere was so tense that I left on the third day."

"May I enquire how you got on with Mrs. Slaney?"

"We didn't get on at all; she was rude to me from the moment I entered the house, and she continued to be so until the moment I left."

"Did you have any seri-

"Once. I told her that I thought she was a most unsuitable wife for my brother, and she was shameless enough not to attempt to deny it. She then made a remark which I considered at the time very strange, but which since I have regarded as being very significant indeed."

"What was that remark, Miss Slaney?"

The witness paused as though realizing she was about to launch a thunderbolt.

"She used these words: 'It may not perhaps be for long.'"

"You are certain those were the words she used?"

"I am certain; they were printed indelibly on my memory."

"We will come to another point, Miss Slaney: is it a fact that your brother made a fresh will shortly before his marriage?"

"Yes."

"And is it also a fact that, in the previous will, he left all his personal estate to you, his only living relative?"

"That is so."

"Did he make any provision for you in this later will?"

The witness snapped her reply.

"He left me a beggarly £100."

Mr. Simon Hoare allowed the significant fact to sink into the minds of the jury.

"May I ask what your own means are?"

"I have to earn my living as a foreign translator for publishers," was the reply.

"Your brother's will, I believe, has been proved at something over £20,000?"

"I understand that is so."

"Did your brother make you any allowance whilst he was alive?"

"Yes; £150 a year."

"And that ceased directly he married?"

"It did."

"In his new will, Mrs. Slaney became his sole beneficiary—that is, with the exception of the £100 he left to you?"

"That is correct."

Another pause, and then Counsel for the Crown slowly sat down.

Sir Morrison Bent was not so considerate in his handling of this witness.

ever think of employing him again, he wouldn't hesitate. He couldn't.

Another ten minutes' walk brought him out of this fit of temporary insanity. He mustn't let his paper down; they were relying on him. To behave in the way he had contemplated would be an unforgivable crime. But, after he had telephoned his stuff that night, he would tell Whittier that he couldn't possibly carry on this assignment; that the office would have to send someone else down to cover the next day's proceedings. He would say he was sick—anything; or it would be better, perhaps, if he told Whittier, who, after all, had some decent instincts, the truth. That was what he ought to have done back in London, of course; if he had had sufficient moral courage, he might have been saved this present agony.

Then he clenched his hands again. It wouldn't be any good telling Whittier the truth, because that cow of a woman, Mrs. Musgrave, had already informed the office that he had been a former sweetheart of her accused sister. He hadn't given the matter any thought before—there had been no time, of course—but he had been instructed to write a Character Sketch of Maud for the Leader Page. And that, in addition to the 2,000-word descriptive sketch of the first day of the Trial.

He couldn't do it! Damn it, he simply couldn't do it! How could he write an intimate character-study of the girl he himself might have forced into this abominable marriage? The fact that he had returned her letter with the words on the back of the envelope, "It is finished, and you finished it," might have been the direct means of her landing herself into this present Hell. He couldn't forget that.

What a revenge Fate was having! He had believed up to now that he could be as callous, as hard-boiled, as generally indifferent to the sufferings of those he wrote about as any man in Fleet Street; but now he felt that he belonged to a shameful brotherhood—a gang of men with neither scruple nor conscience; a crowd of sadists who found their secret pleasure in exposing the dreadful secrets of their fellow men and women. It was an awful thought.

Reaching the hotel at last, the hall-porter handed him a telegram.

This read—

Go the limit Slaney stop real Farrar stuff stop relying on you stop Banner.

He knew what this meant; he knew that he was supposed to apply every artifice of his craft to squeeze the last drop of mawkish sentiment out of his story.

It was a revolting prospect, and he did not know how he could do it. In any case, what line should he take? "The Most Beautiful Woman in Burminster" fighting an heroic battle for her life against heavy odds? That was obviously what the *Banner* wanted, seeing how they had twisted the first story he had sent them. Or, again, should he describe in exciting prose the amazing attitude taken up by the woman prisoner in the dock that day? There was no doubt this was what the other Special Correspondents would make the high-light of their stories; and it was, moreover, the line which all his training told him was the best available.

But, whatever attitude he took up in his own story, the task was supremely distasteful; it was the worst assignment he had ever been given by the *Banner*, and that was saying a good deal. Feeling like a man going to the gallows himself, he walked over to a corner table in the big lounge and began to write. Somehow or other, he compiled the necessary couple of thousand words, and then, crossing the road to the General Post Office, he got through to London.

An hour after he had telephoned the last line, and just as he was about to sit down to a meal which he knew would be tasteless, the hotel hall-porter came in.

"Excuse me, Mr. Farrar, but you are wanted on the telephone. It's your newspaper, I think."

The man at the other end proved to be Wainman, the *Right* news Editor. He was in a complaining mood.

"I've just been going through your stuff, Farrar," he said sharply, "and I'm afraid I don't think very much of it. Here you have one of the finest stories of the year—and you make a muck of it! We are all very disappointed."

Tom managed to find a few words.

"What's the matter with it?" he asked.

"Matter with it! Why, there's no life in the stuff—it's just so

much dead mutton. Aren't you feeling well—or what's the matter?"

It was more than he could bear.

"If you don't like the way I'm treating this story, you can send somebody else down to take my place. As a matter of fact, I'd be glad if you'd do so."

From the other end of the wire he heard a gasp.

"Do you know who you're talking to—and what you're saying?" Whittier demanded.

"Yes, and I mean what I said; if you don't like the way I'm treating this story, send someone down to-night to take my place. And you can tell the Features Editor that I can't do that Leader Page article."

"Well, I'll be damned!" he heard the Night-news Editor mutter.

Feeling that he could stand no more, Tom rang off.

It was not until he had finished a dinner which, as he had expected, proved to be entirely savourless, and had gone into the big smoking-room, that he found that Sir Morrison Bent was also staying at the Crown.

The famous Counsel smiled at him as he entered; the two had met a month before at one of the famous Saturday Night Dinners at the Barley Club, and Bent had then appeared to go out of his way to be pleasant to the young reporter.

"Hello, Farrar," he called in cheery greeting; "come and sit down and have a drink."

If he had possessed the same amount of moral courage he was to develop later, Tom would have made some excuse; for he was in no mood to talk to the man whose task it was to save the girl he still thought of as Maud Latimer from the gallows. But as it was, he slipped into the chair next to Bent and said that he would have a whisky-and-soda.

When the two drinks had been brought by the waiter, the celebrated K. C. lifted his glass.

"Well, here's luck," he said.

"Good luck, sir," was the reply.

"I saw you in Court to-day; you're covering the Trial for the *Banner*, I suppose?"

"Yes."

EVIDENCE FOR THE PROSECUTION

Counsel smiled as he pulled at his cigar.

"It ought to provide you with some interesting copy that it's one of the best murder trials I have ever taken. A very remarkable woman, my client—and, by the way, voice rising, "she's an old friend of yours, I believe?"

"I used to know her when I worked on a Burminster

"So she told me. I had a few minutes' talk with her. The Court rose to-day, and she asked me if I should be able to see you."

"She said that?"

"Yes. I told her that I thought we were staying at the hotel. Then she gave me this message for you: 'Tell him I bear him no ill-will.'"

Tom did not know what to say. He could not analyze what might be at the back of the words.

"And you can tell her, Sir Morrison, that I hope to come through this unhappy business all right," he replied, after an awkward pause.

"I certainly will. And now," getting up, "I'm afraid I've got several hours' work to do on this case, so you will excuse me. Good night, my boy."

"Good night, Sir Morrison."

Tom went to bed early, but he couldn't sleep. The amazing events of that day had made too deep an impression on his mind. He tossed about for hours; and when, finally, with the dawn, with the purpose of going off for a long, refreshing walk around the Common, he felt washed out.

The exercise in the keen morning air brought some relief both mentally and physically, but when he returned to the hotel the problem pressing on his mind was still unsolved. Should he, or should he not, carry out the resolution which had come to him the night before? He felt that he could not stand the emotional strain of reporting the rest of the Trial; it was an absolute torture to him to have to write that nightly story.

As he passed the office of the hotel, the receptionist handed him a letter.

It was from the *Banner*; from Whittier, the Night Editor, to be precise.

It read—

Dear Farrar,—

I am writing in a friendly way to try to give you a word of advice. I don't know if you were serious last night on the telephone, but you have wonderful prospects in this office, and it would be a great pity, in my opinion, if you threw them all away. Although I criticized your stuff last night (and it deserved it), that does not alter the opinion I have always held, namely that your work is admirably suited to this paper.

I have said nothing about our talk to anyone, and I suggest that we now forget everything about it.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

James Whittier.

At any other time, Tom might have appreciated reading these sentiments, but as it was, he frowned over the typewritten list

CHAPTER THREE

THE BETRAYAL

I

THE Slaney-Leadbeater murder trial had taken on one of its most pulsatingly-exciting phases: the woman prisoner was the box giving her evidence.

Once again, everybody in Court was struck by her appearance. She was neatly but becomingly dressed in a simple dark frock which showed off the lines of her figure to perfection; her manner was one of well-bred self-possession, and she gave her answers to even the most embarrassing questions without a break in her voice.

Her Counsel, Sir Morrison Bent, showed his mastery of Court technique as he led her through the maze.

"Your marriage did not prove to be a success, Mrs. Slaney

"No; I am sorry to say it was a dismal failure."

"Can you give me the reasons?"

"Certainly. One of my chief causes for complaint was the unpleasant habits of my husband; these both shocked and horrified me."

"What effect did this discovery have on you?"

"Well, for one thing, it caused me to lose temporarily my mental balance."

"And as a result of that?"

"To my infinite regret, I allowed Mr. Leadbeater to become my lover."

"You say you regret taking that step?"

"Yes; whilst I have no desire to excuse myself, I wish at the same time to tell the Court I deeply regret being so foolish."

"You realize, of course, Mrs. Slaney, that you are facing the gravest charge in criminal law?"

"I do."

"Now I want you to give me a plain 'Yes' or 'No' to my next question. You understand?"

"Perfectly."

"Did you or did you not, Mrs. Slaney, murder your husband?"

"I did not murder my husband."

"Did you administer strychnine to him in any form?"

"I did not."

"Did you ever handle strychnine?"

"Never. I did not even know there was any strychnine in my husband's surgery—he never discussed anything to do with his profession with me."

"Did your husband, as well as you, realize that the marriage was a failure?"

"Yes—but he was the type of man never to acknowledge defeat or failure; he was too much of an egotist to do that."

"You have admitted that the male prisoner became your lover—"

"Yes."

"Did this guilty association go beyond the usual liaison?"

"No."

"There was no plot between you and Mr. Leadbeater in regard of your husband?"

"Certainly not."

"Was such a thing ever discussed by"

"Most decidedly not. I should never"

beater even to suggest such a thing."

"Now, Mrs. Slaney, I come to a very important matter. You heard one of the previous witnesses, Miss Primrose Slaney, state in her evidence that you used the expression 'It won't be for long,' when she expressed to you her views on your marriage?"

"Yes, I heard it."

"Can you tell me why you used such an expression?"

There was no hesitation.

"Certainly. Although I did not explain more fully to M^r Slaney, because her attitude was so overpoweringly offensive, what I meant by using those words was that I intended shortly to leave my husband."

"And your reason?"

"I had many reasons, but the most important was because of his unpleasant habits."

"I will come now to this question of the new Will, M^r Slaney. Did you influence your husband in any way concerning the making of this new Will?"

"Not in the least. He told me he was making a new Will, and that, in what he described as 'duty bound,' he was leaving everything to me, with the exception of a small sum to be paid to my sister. He did this entirely on his own."

"Did you know Miss Slaney's circumstances?"

"No. They were no concern of mine."

"When did your husband first tell you about this new Will?"

"Directly I agreed to marry him."

"You are quite sure it was of his own volition that he made this statement?"

"I am quite sure."

"You repeat you did not influence him in any way?"

"Certainly not. The whole thing came as a complete surprise to me."

"But you considered, did you not, that it was a husband's proper duty to provide adequately for his wife in the event of his being left alone?"

"Naturally."

"I have only one more question to ask you, Mrs. Slaney. Were you, in any way whatever, connected with your husband's death by strychnine poisoning?"

"I swear I was not."

There were many bitter passages when the witness was cross-examined by Counsel for the Crown. Mr. Simon Hoare did not pull his punches.

"Would you describe yourself as a very attractive young woman, Mrs. Slaney?" was the first question he put to her.

"That is not for me to say."

"Please don't trifle with me; this is a very serious matter. I ask you the question again: would you consider yourself a very attractive young woman?"

"You make it very difficult for me to say either 'Yes' or 'No.'"

"You are still trifling with me. Please answer the question."

"Well, I suppose I have certain attractions."

"Exactly! Now, would you consider your late husband an attractive match—that is, apart from the prominent position he held as a local dentist?"

"No, I would not."

"Then why, Mrs. Slaney, did you consent to marry him?"

She was not nonplussed.

"He said he was desperately in love with me."

"Does the average woman marry a man just because he says he is desperately in love with her?"

"I cannot answer that."

"I'll put it this way: were *you* in love with *him*?"

There was a brief hesitation. Then: "I liked him."

"But were you in love with him?"

"No! I don't know that I was exactly in love with him. But does every woman have to be in love with the man she marries?" This turning of the tables elicited an appreciative murmur from the public seats.

"I don't pose as an authority on your sex, Mrs. Slaney," was Counsel's cold retort. "We have established the fact, then," he proceeded, "that affection was not the motive that induced you to marry your husband. Was it his position?"

"If you are suggesting that I married him for money, then you are wrong, Mr. Hoare," witness retorted.

"I am afraid I must insist upon getting a clear answer to my original question: what induced you to marry Oswald Slaney?"

"My lord," said the witness, turning to t

be expected to answer such a question?"

His lordship frowned.

"I think you have pursued that line of thought long enough, Mr. Hoare," he declared; "after all, if we were all to give a strict account of all our actions, some of us would be placed in very embarrassing positions."

Counsel for the Crown obviously fought his anger.

"If your lordship pleases," he said curtly, before turning to the witness again.

"As you have not seen fit to tell the Court the real reason why you married this unfortunate man, I am compelled to put further questions to you," he said: "can you explain, for instance, why only a month after you married your husband, you engaged in a sexual intrigue with his assistant?"

This time, it looked as though he had got under her guard. The face which had been so serene a moment before, now became flushed with anger.

"Isn't it sufficient that I have acknowledged my guilt, and that I have deeply regretted it?" she replied.

Counsel pressed on.

"Is it not a fact, Mrs. Slaney, that you despised your husband from the beginning: that you married him merely for what he could give you of this world's goods?—and that your shameless conduct so shortly after you went to Repton Road was quite in keeping with your normal outlook on life?"

"That's untrue!" Leaning over the side of the witness-box, she looked at her questioner with venomous hatred.

"Nevertheless, Mrs. Slaney, I suggest to you that that is the truth underlying this terrible tragedy—that you married Oswald Slaney for your own convenience, that you despised him, and that you saw no scruples in taking a lover at the very first opportunity?"

"And I tell you again, Mr. Hoare, that it's untrue!"

The Judge interposed.

"You must please control yourself, Mrs. Slaney. Counsel for the Crown is merely doing his duty in putting these questions to you. And, however embarrassing they may be, you must answer them courteously, and to the best of your ability."

"Very well, my lord."

Counsel for the Crown continued his racking cross-examination.

behalf, that the reason you committed adultery with Mr. Leadbeater was because you had been thrown off your mental balance. Is that true?"

"Perfectly true."

"I shouldn't have thought, Mrs. Slaney, after watching your demeanour for the past two days, that you were a woman easily thrown off your mental balance."

"What I said was true."

"As you did not love your husband, perhaps you will now tell me whether you loved your paramour?"

There was a tense silence.

"Did you or did you not love your paramour?"

Still silence.

"Did you or did you not love your paramour, Mrs. Slaney?"

"Go to Hell!" was the slow, distinctly-spoken and vehement response this time.

"Silence!" called the Court Usher, in an endeavour to quell the hubbub of sound that followed on the three words.

The Judge rapped on the dais.

"I have already warned you, witness, about controlling yourself; do not let me have to speak to you again."

She turned to him with passionate pleading.

"But, my lord, am I to be insulted with impunity? Have no rights at all?"

As though he felt personally rebuked, Sir Morrison Berkeaved himself up from his chair.

"If your lordship pleases," he said sternly, "I beg to protest against the line of cross-examination taken by my learned friend. I have been very patient—but there is a limit to one's endurance. I now formally ask you for protection for my client, my lady."

Mr. Justice McMichael reflected for a few seconds.

"I think you had better leave that particular point, Mr. Hoare; it appears to me to have very little importance, in any case; what does it matter if these two prisoners were or were not in love with each other? Not every couple who form a guilty intrigue of this kind are in love; usually, it is merely a case of sexual lust."

Counsel for the Prosecution bit his lip.

"As your lordship pleases," he said very curtly. "But I was endeavouring to establish what in my view was a very important

point: if these two persons had been actually in love with each other, there might have been some excuse for their behaviour; but, as Mrs. Slaney has not been able to admit as much, then this vulgar intrigue must, I suggest, be placed at a much lower level."

He turned to the witness again.

"You have told my learned friend that you had no hand in the murder of your husband. Is that true?"

"I have already said so."

"You are an intelligent woman?"

"Thank you."

"No doubt you have read many novels in the course of your life?"

"Not many."

"Love stories?"

"I may have read a few love stories."

"Thrillers?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"They bore me."

"Why?"

"Because the few I have picked up from time to time have had such ridiculous plots."

Counsel took a book from his Junior. It was a novel with bright yellow jacket. He held it up so that witness could see the title—"Death by Misadventure."

"Perhaps you will be good enough to look at this novel and tell me if you have seen it before?"

The volume was passed to the Court Usher, who handed it to the witness. She took hold of it as though it were something unclean, gave a casual glance at the title and then put it on the ledge of the witness-box.

"Yes; I have seen it before." Her voice was now under complete control again.

"May I ask where?"

"At home. My husband bought this novel because a friend had told him that a dentist was one of the chief characters."

"And he was professionally interested?"

"I suppose so; I didn't ask him."

"Did you read the novel yourself, Mrs. Slaney?"

"No; one look at the title was sufficient for me; I'm not interested in horrors."

Counsel for the Crown looked at her as though she were an exhibit under glass.

"You are not interested in horrors, Mrs. Slaney..... Well, I'll let it pass: the point I want to establish now is whether you admit having read this novel?"

"I have already told you I have not read it."

"Then you are not aware that the plot hinges chiefly on a man being murdered by means of strychnine?"

"How should I be aware of it when I have not even read the book?"

"You are ready to swear you have not read this book?"

"I swear I haven't."

"You have heard the medical evidence to the effect that your husband died as a result of strychnine poisoning?"

"Yes."

"And that, in the opinion of these experts, he was deliberately murdered?"

"Yes."

"You did not murder him, you say?"

"I did not."

Counsel for the Crown flung the papers he held in his hand down with an angry gesture. It was as though the force of his feelings overwhelmed him.

"But you do know, do you not, Mrs. Slaney, who caused your husband's death?"

It was a trick—but it succeeded.

"Yes, I do know," was the even-toned reply.

The crowded Court swayed like a field of corn swept by a sudden breeze. People, choking with excitement, caught at their breath.

Counsel proceeded:

"You say you know who murdered your husband, Mrs. Slaney?"

She nodded.

"Yes. It was that man!" pointing to the dock.

Basil Leadbeater jumped up so convulsively from his seat at he might have been a clockwork figure.

"It's a lie!—a filthy lie!" he cried passionately, and seemed about to leap over the dock-wall in order to get at his accuser. Immediately the warder who had been sitting behind him seized

his arms. There was a desperate struggle. Benjamin Casey rushed to the front of the dock and tried to pacify Leadbeater.

The scene presented a tableau which was to live long in the memory of all who watched it—there was first of all the witness, standing erect, appreciating without doubt the full significance of the bomb-shell she had thrown, but assuming an air of almost defiant confidence; there was the Judge on his dais, apparently so taken by surprise that he did not quite know what to say; there were the rows of journalists writing as though their lives depended on putting this scene on to paper as quickly as possible; whilst at their long table in the well of the Court below the dock, the various Counsel remained immovable—as though they themselves had been temporarily robbed of all volition—and at the back of the Court, the spectators craned their necks afresh in order to get a better view.

Finally, the Judge broke the silence.

"You appreciate that you are on oath, Mrs. Slaney?" he said.

She bowed to him.

"Of course, my lord," she replied.

"Very well; please continue, Mr. Hoare."

Counsel for the Crown repeated the last few dramatic words.

"'Yes, it was that man'—you are accusing your fellow-prisoner of murdering your husband. Is that so?"

"Yes."

"On what evidence?"

Above the violent sobbing of the male prisoner, who was now sitting with his head held between his hands, the voice of the witness rose clearly.

"He told me he was going to do it—and that he meant to use strychnine."

"Let me put this quite plainly—you say that Mr. Leadbeater told you he contemplated murdering your husband?"

"Yes."

"When was this?"

"About a week before my husband died."

"And yet," thundered the Counsel, "you ~~denied~~ ~~perjured~~ ~~your~~ ~~evidence~~ ~~that~~ ~~there~~ ~~was~~ ~~any~~ ~~plot~~ ~~between~~ ~~you~~ ~~and~~ ~~Mr.~~ ~~Leadbeater~~. Isn't that so?"

"There was no plot."

"No plot?"

"No. Let me explain, please: when Mr. Leadbeater told me of his intentions, I thought he was making a crude but grim jest. I never realized until it was too late that he was in earnest."

"This is the first time you have told anyone of this?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"In the first place, I was so stupefied; secondly, as I have already tried to tell you, I didn't realize until it was too late that Mr. Leadbeater was serious; and thirdly, I was so overwhelmed by horror at being suspected myself that I could not collect my thoughts with sufficient clearness."

"I suggest to you that this is an invention on your part made on the spur of the moment?"

"It is nothing of the sort. It is the truth as far as I know it."

"Do you mean to tell the Court in all seriousness that, suspecting Mr. Leadbeater of being your husband's murderer, as now admit you did, you did not inform the police at the time of your arrest?"

"No."

"What was your reason?"

"I thought, after all, there might be some dreadful mistake—about my husband, unhappy as he was, had committed suicide."

"You don't think so now?"

"No. I believe that Mr. Leadbeater gave him the strychnine."

"You have no other grounds for your charge, except the statement you allege Mr. Leadbeater made to you a week before your husband died?"

"No; I have no other grounds."

"You are not saying this in order to try to save your own skin?"

"No, I am not afraid to die. But I am innocent. I had nothing to do with my husband's death."

From the dock there came an anguished cry. It sounded like something made by a tortured animal.

"My lord!" shouted Basil Leadbeater, springing up from his seat again, "it is not true! She's telling a lie! It was she who murdered her husband—you must help me!"

The Judge made a sign with his hand, and the warder, who had been holding the prisoner by his arms, forced him back into

his seat.

"You must control yourself, Mr. Leadbeater," the Judge said; "you must leave the conduct of your defence to your Counsel; let me assure you that you could not be in better hands."

"Thank you, my lord," and the prisoner, still sobbing piteously, subsided into his former attitude of desperate despair.

Up till now, the Court had seen Mr. Benjamin Casey as the embodiment of suave if somewhat sardonic courtesy. But now the Irish K. C. looked terrible in his wrath.

"You have just accused your fellow-prisoner of being solely concerned in the murder of your husband, Mrs. Slaney. That is so, isn't it?"

"I have told the truth," was the answer.

"The truth! I suggest to you that you have committed perjury of the most abominable kind?"

"I have told the truth."

II

Tom Farrar's thoughts as he watched her return to the dock were like so many raw nerves. He had known her to be unscrupulous, and he had felt from the beginning of the trial that she was guilty of this hideous crime, but that she should be so ruthless as to lie in such flagrant fashion in order to save herself at the expense of her hapless victim (for that was how he had placed Leadbeater), was completely nauseating.

And yet, he asked himself, why should he be surprised? Wasn't she running true to form? Wasn't she merely living up to her real character? A girl who could have treated him in the way she had done back in the old days, was not likely to have many scruples when a cleverly-spoken lie might save her from the hangman's noose. But how he would be able to bring himself to write that scene later in the day he did not know.

Maud, walking with an unfaltering step towards the dock, caught sight of Tom's well-groomed head as the reporter bent over his pad. He was afraid, she supposed, of meeting her eye. And yet he had sent her that message of good-will through Morrison Bent the previous night. Well, she couldn't complain after all, even a hard-boiled newspaper reporter could scarcely

be expected to smile publicly at a suspected murderess—even although he had once been her lover.

What did it matter, anyway? Guilty as she was, she now felt she could bamboozle everyone in the Court—including that old fool of a Judge himself! She had done well so far; and if she could only keep it up, she believed (and Morrison Bent supported her in this belief) that she would get away with it.

Simon Hoare, for all his cleverness, had been wrong: she had not told that lie—that utterly damnable, perhaps, but necessary lie—on the spur of the moment; on the contrary, she had planned the exact psychological second in which it should be declaimed.

And what a sensation it had caused! For all the seriousness of the situation, she had scarcely been able to refrain from laughing! She had sworn to punish Leadbeater for the way he had cursed her at the time of their joint arrest; and she was not the type to forget.

The poor mutt! Did he imagine that *she* was going to risk being hanged when by a few cleverly uttered words she could save herself? What was his life compared to hers? Wasn't she Maud Latimer? Once out of that cursed pen, there was practically nothing she couldn't do with the £20,000 that would then come to her!

Serene-faced, looking entirely apart from the sordid atmosphere by which she was surrounded, she took her seat in the dock and gazed calmly at the Judge. Even the fact that her fellow-prisoner shrank away as though she had the plague, did not affect her. She remained aloof.

As for Leadbeater himself, he felt again like a sorely-wounded animal stricken unto death. He had no misgivings about the grievous wrong that had just been done him; that was why he had cried out in such passionate protest. His Counsel had told him that he must put up a better show; that he must not allow members of the jury to think him guilty.

"Already their sympathies—don't forget there are ten men to two women on the jury—are with Mrs. Slaney," Casey had said warningly.

Of course, their sympathies were with that heartless bitch; she was an infinitely better actress than he was an actor. Yet, dear God, he was innocent, and she was guilty! Although he had no direct proof, he knew that she had deliberately poured

strychnine into Slaney's glass of stout. Considering the coldly calculating she-devil she was, was it likely that she would be content to live with such a poor specimen as Oswald Slaney, once she had nerved herself to kill him and was already sure of possessing his money?

And she had planned with devilish cunning that *he* should suffer for her crime! He couldn't stand it! He just couldn't stand it!

"You—!" he hissed, turning to look at her.

She remained indifferent to this abuse, looking as remote from him as an angel in heaven, but the warder tapped him on the shoulder.

"Keep quiet," he said warningly.

Leadbeater subsided once again into his former attitude of complete despair.

III

Through his powerful spectacles, Mr. Justice McMichael watched this by-play. Throughout his twenty years as a Judge, he had never known such a prisoner as this woman. With her character and her effrontery, she could climb to any position—once she were free. What on earth had induced her to marry such a commonplace grub as that provincial dentist? And what had induced her to take as a lover the crude lout now stricken with abject fear because he was afraid he would hang?

Simon Hoare's reflections were stormy ones. In the first place, he felt that he had been worsted in the recent exchange of passages with the female prisoner. He could not repress a feeling of admiration for the manner in which she had stood up to his racking fire; but, assured that she was guilty, and that she had committed perjury in order to try to save her own neck, he was furious to think that she had made a favourable impression upon the jury. Whilst in his own mind he was convinced—as he had been convinced from the beginning—that the two prisoners had been jointly concerned in this cruel murder, he was still more convinced that the man, if he had acted at all, had acted under the irresistible domination of the woman. And yet, unless he made a supreme effort, the latter would get off; it all depended upon the Judge's summing-up, and McMichael, old satyr as he was,

could be depended upon, he was afraid, to do all he could to save this very attractive but treacherous creature from the gallows.

Sir Morrison Bent, on the other hand, was filled with very different feelings. His client, against his will, had taken a colossal risk (he had tried from the beginning to prevent her going into the box), but she had brought it off with astonishing skill and superb *aplomb*. What a woman! She had got away with it, and entirely off her own bat! Unless the luck went dead against him, he could see himself achieving the success of his life—but, he frankly admitted, if Maud Slaney was set free, it would be more by her own endeavours than through his forensic ability.

As for Benjamin Casey, he glowed with an anger that he could scarcely control. Even more than Simon Hoare, he realized the effect the last witness's evidence might have on the jury. He had little respect for his client, but he was convinced that Lead-beater was innocent of having any part in the actual murder, however reprehensible his previous conduct might have been.

Amongst the crowd of spellbound spectators sat Ike Labin. London's Entertainment World knew Ike Labin as a recent export from Hollywood. There he had represented the famous Cosmopolis Film Corporation, and had now come to London as that gigantic undertaking's principal European representative, with headquarters in Wardour Street.

Ike Labin saw life solely in terms of Pictures; to him the world, and all its inhabitants, were nothing more than a series of colossal film productions. Possessing little artistic sense, but a very vivid imagination, and an extraordinary opportunistic gift, he was always on the look-out for fresh talent. He concerned himself principally with attractive young women who might be induced to serve two purposes—one to act as victims to his amorous propensities, and secondly to promote his personal stock in the film world generally, and with his own Company in particular, by becoming film stars.

He had followed the Trial from the beginning, having been attracted in the first place by intense morbid interest in this astonishing sex-drama, and because, directly he had seen the photograph of the female prisoner in the newspapers, he had been

struck by a sudden idea. This woman Slaney had a film face ; she would pass any test, he felt certain, with flying colours. If only she could act !

The longer he listened to the Trial, however, the more convinced Ike Labin became that this fear could be discounted : the woman who was holding the world's limelight at the moment was indeed a natural actress of positive genius. Her demeanour throughout the Trial had proved this ; and if further evidence had been wanting, the exhibition she had just given in the witness-box had provided it.

His duty, he told himself, was plain : he must get her name on the dotted line as soon as possible. Already, perhaps, she had received other offers. The thought made him sweat. The fact that her life would hang in the balance until the jury returned its verdict, merely increased his desire to get her signed up.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SUMMING-UP

I

"AND so" concluded Counsel for the Crown, "I call upon you, members of the jury, to see that Justice is done. The woman prisoner has declared her entire innocence of this dreadful crime ; she has sworn on oath that she had nothing to do with the death of her husband. In order to try to secure her own safety, she has not scrupled to cast the entire blame upon her fellow-prisoner. The question is, members of the jury, whether you believe her story ? I should not be faithful in my duty as Counsel for the Prosecution if I did not warn you most seriously of the danger of allowing the guilty to go free and the innocent to be sentenced in this case.

"Once again, I must ask you : are you to believe her story ? That is the crux of the whole matter. I suggest to you that the astonishing attitude maintained by the female prisoner throughout the Trial has been actuated not so much by her innocence, as by

a determination to act a part. From what we already know about her previous life, we can form a pretty shrewd estimate of how she was determined to comport herself once she found herself in this dock," turning sideways, and thus facing both prisoners.

"My suggestion to you is that she was determined to get out of the mess in which she found herself, and that she has used as an instrument an exhibition of consummate hypocrisy. Let me remind you that never once throughout the dreadful revelations that have been made at this Trial, has the female prisoner shown any sign of remorse or even of embarrassment. No, she has controlled herself with an iron determination, and, as I have said before, with the consummate art of a born actress.

"As I read her character, she is entitled, I think, to be placed amongst the great women criminals of history. She has the same attribute, a calm but completely callous inflexibility of purpose—you will remember that she gave me no direct answer when I questioned her on the all-important point of why she married a man so unattractive as Oswald Slaney. But to those of us who are well-versed with the manifold wickednesses of this world, if she had been truthful—but, I submit, she dared not be truthful—she would have said: 'I never had the slightest affection of any kind for my husband; I married him merely because I knew he had saved a good deal of money, that he idolized me, and was therefore likely to give way to all my whims, and because I was determined to make the most of my attractions now that this opportunity presented itself. Of course, if I had waited, I might have done much better—but here was a chance to get into safe harbour, and I took it!' That, I repeat, is what she would have said had she dared to be truthful. You must remember that Maud Latimer, as she then was, belonged to a large family, all the members of whom, with the exception of her one married sister, had been on the brink of poverty for very many years. By saying that, I cast no reflection, of course, upon the other members of the Latimer family—they were, like so many thousands of others, the mere sports of fate—but, nevertheless, it is a very significant fact for you to remember when you come to consider your verdict.

"And, once having come into safe harbour, what did the female prisoner do? One might have assumed that she would

THE SUMMING-UP

have played safe at least for a time—that she would have nothing to arouse her doting husband's suspicions. But no. I suggest to you, members of the jury, one of the most striking commentaries on her character—that ruthless, unscrupulous generally overbearing character of which we have had striking proof throughout this Trial—that, once she had achieved her purpose, and had married this foolish dentist, once she was assured that if anything happened to him, she would be richer by no less than a sum of £20,000 (vast wealth to a man who had earned only 30s. a week in a cheap dress-shop), she was desperately anxious to get rid of her incubus. Let me remind you of an important fact: once she had achieved her purpose she made no compromise with convention, or even with good manners, but openly flaunting her contempt for her husband, she yielded to her desires and accepted without remorse of any kind the position of her own husband's assistant!

"Why did she do this? Once again she gave a most unsatisfactory answer in the witness-box. She tried to explain her conduct by saying she had been thrown off her mental balance by disgust of the 'unpleasant habits' of her husband. I have heard the evidence of Doctor Trevor, a personal friend of the dead man. He told you he had no knowledge of any 'unpleasant habits' of Oswald Slaney—and, for my part, members of the jury, I have no possible hesitation whatever in suggesting to you that this allegation was nothing more nor less than a foul invention invented by the female prisoner in order to try to cloak this intrigue of hers. Maud Slaney has proved herself a clever woman, but like most clever women, she over-reached herself when she told us that abominable lie....."

II

Mr. Justice McMichael took off his reading-glasses, put on another pair of spectacles and continued his address to the jury.

"There is no need for me to re-emphasize the sordidness of this case," he said; "I will content myself by saying that it reflects in almost every aspect some of the more vile prompting of human nature."

"Nevertheless, it will be your duty when you retire, as you shortly will, to consider your verdict, not to allow any prejudice you may have against either or both prisoners to cloud your

judgment. You are here, as I am here, to see that justice is done; that is your paramount duty: that is why you have been called to do this public service.

"Counsel for the Prosecution has dilated at great length and with considerable force upon the behaviour of the female prisoner. He has painted a very black picture against her. It is now my duty to comment on the propositions and suggestions he has put forward to you.

"It would be idle for me to attempt to deny that many facts have been brought out in the course of the evidence that are derogatory to Mrs. Slaney. Let me go through them, one by one.

"In the first place, emphasis has been laid by Counsel for the Crown on the circumstance of her marriage to Oswald Slaney. He has pointed out that the female prisoner was not able to give any very satisfactory reason why she married the deceased. But, as I brought to your notice at the time, we are not here to enquire into human motives—not, that is, unless these same human motives have a powerful and important bearing on this dreadful crime. There must be a very large number of women who marry each year in this country without the propelling force of love for their husbands. As I see it, you should not allow the circumstance that Maud Latimer married Oswald Slaney, even if her principal motive was to secure a comfortable home and future security, to be held against her; for should such a fact be held against her, then every woman placed in similar circumstances would call down upon her head the harsh title of a fortune-hunter. I think I can safely say that you should ignore that particular point."

Mr. Simon Hoare turned to whisper to his Junior.

"I knew the old devil would try to get her off," he said fiercely.

"Considerable emphasis," went on the Judge, "has also been made by Counsel for the Crown on the words uttered by the female prisoner to the witness, Miss Primrose Slaney. You will remember, no doubt, what these words were. In any case, I will repeat them. When Miss Slaney asked the female prisoner why she had married her brother, Maud Slaney used the words: 'It will not be for long.' Viewed from a certain angle, such a remark might be misconstrued very badly; in other words, if the female prisoner had had at that time the thought of killing her

husband in her heart, then they would undoubtedly be very important for you to consider. But, members of the jury, you have heard the explanation that, owing to what she defined as the 'unpleasant habits' of her husband, Mrs. Slaney had intended to leave him at an early date. Sir Morrison Bent, her Counsel, has very rightly pointed out to you that any woman, faced with such a problem as Mrs. Slaney has sworn she was faced, might very naturally have made use of such words. It is for you to say, of course, whether she used them in the sense that she says she did, or whether they had a far more important and therefore sinister significance.

Now, as regards these same 'unpleasant habits' Mrs. Slaney alleges her husband was addicted to. Both Dr. Trevor, who was a personal friend as well as a medical adviser to Mr. Slaney, and Miss Primrose Slaney, sister of the deceased, have denied with considerable indignation that the dead man was in any way abnormal. You must not, I think, place too much reliance on this rebutting evidence; experience of human nature has proved time and time again that any person who is abnormally inclined does not shout the fact from the house-tops; it is quite possible, in my opinion, that Mr. Slaney was indeed addicted to these practices, and the only person who would have an intimate knowledge of this unpleasant side of his character would, naturally, be his wife. And, granted this premise, it is only natural, I suggest, that his own wife should be horrified at gaining this knowledge, and should be anxious to leave such a husband. In any case, the remark which she made can be viewed in the light of this knowledge; but once again I would remind you that it is your duty to decide in which sense the words, 'It will not be for long,' were used by her. Granted that you accept her evidence on this very important point I think you will agree with her Counsel that this is just the sort of statement the average young wife might well have made.

"Another point which you will have to consider very carefully is the fact that, within a month of her marriage, this young wife entered into a guilty *liaison* with her fellow-prisoner. Mrs. Slaney has not denied this adulterous relationship, but she has put forward some kind of defence. It will be up to you to decide amongst yourselves whether this defence is tenable. Mrs. Slaney, you will remember, whilst expressing regret for this moral lapse

—which, in ordinary circumstances, would have been quite inexcusable, of course—explained that, owing to the shock she received concerning her husband's habits, she became temporarily thrown off her mental balance. Now, members of the jury, it is an undoubted fact that, under the influence of a great shock, the most respectable men and women have been known to commit grievous faults. I would not have you to suppose, however, that I personally can condone such conduct as that which she has admitted in her evidence; neither do I suggest that you should condone it; but it is my duty to point out to you that, once you accept her evidence on the matter of her husband's habits, then it may be possible for you to accept the explanation she has put forward concerning the immoral behaviour. I shall return to this phase of the case later, however.

"I now come to the prisoner Leadbeater. You have heard the evidence of various witnesses—evidence which has proved conclusively that this man of 29 was a pronounced profligate. One witness, who has known him intimately for some years, has been forced to describe him as a 'persistent pursuer of women.' Counsel for the Crown has put forward the suggestion to you that the female prisoner acted the part of a Delilah to this Samson, and that all the advances came from her side. Leadbeater, in his own evidence, has supported this. It will be for you to say whether you believe his statement. If you don't believe it, you may very well conclude that this 'persistent pursuer of women' was physically attracted to the very prepossessing young wife his employer had brought home, and that, following his usual practice, he immediately endeavoured to seduce her. We cannot know the exact truth because each prisoner has told an entirely different story: the woman has said that the man took advantage of her confused mental state, whilst the man has thrown the entire blame on the woman whom he has described as 'a heartless, unscrupulous and cruel temptress.'

"In any case, there was, it has been admitted, this guilty relationship. And now I return to the remarks I made a few minutes before. There can be no possible doubt but what this same relationship had a very powerful influence upon the crime itself; indeed, if there had not been this *liaison* between the two prisoners, Oswald Slaney, it is certain, would not have been done to death.

"Once again, we have the same confused picture ; once again, each prisoner endeavours to throw the blame—the awful blame—on to the other's shoulders. The woman has denied having anything to do with the murder ; not only has she sworn that she did not kill her husband, but she has said that she did not even know there was any strychnine in his surgery. Let us consider that point, for it is a very important one ; here we have a young woman, taken from business life, to become the wife of a professional man. Now, without casting any disparagement on a useful and honourable profession, I do not suppose that any one of us would say that dentistry had a romantic or even an interesting side to it—not interesting, that is, to anyone outside of the profession itself. It is not likely, in my view, that Mrs. Slaney should wish to discuss any branch of his work with her husband. Is she, then, to be believed, when she tells us that she did not even know there was strychnine amongst her husband's drugs ? My view is that she should be believed, and I say that because such a statement is well within human probability."

"The old devil's determined to get her off," whispered Simon Hoare to his Junior.

"Of course ! But can he kid the jury ?" came the reply.

"In the case of Leadbeater, we have to consider the following facts," continued the Judge. "As a qualified dentist himself, and as Mr. Slaney's assistant, this prisoner would naturally be aware of the existence of strychnine in the surgery. What is more, he would often use the drug himself in the course of his work. Mr. Casey, his Counsel, very rightly pointed out to you in his final speech that no man in Leadbeater's position who was not a complete lunatic, would contemplate for a single moment using such a drug as strychnine if he intended to commit murder, because the fatal symptoms are so recognizable. If we were dealing with people possessing full control over their reasoning faculties, this argument would carry even more weight than it does at present ; but we have to remember that both the accused must have been in a state of abnormal excitement. The one thing that concerns us is this : the plain and unmistakable fact that Oswald Slaney died as a result of being given a fatal dose of strychnine—you will remember that the medical experts who conducted the autopsy stated that over two grains of the drug were found in his body, which is more than sufficient to kill any human being—and,

that no evidence has been brought forward to prove that this fatal dose was administered by a third party. In other words, one of the two persons now in the dock committed the murder--and it will be your duty to decide which one, or both, are guilty.

"Let me tell you what the Law has laid down on this last point: A and B are charged jointly (as in this case) with the murder of C. Now if the jury decides that, although A actually committed the crime, he or she did it with the full knowledge and perhaps with the help of B, then both prisoners must be declared equally guilty. That is what the Law says, and it will be your duty to tell me when you return from considering your verdict (1) which of these two prisoners you decide actually administered the poison, and (2) whether the other person had full knowledge that he or she intended to commit murder. In conclusion, I must inform you that, however painful the duty may be, you must not shirk it. You will now please retire to consider your verdict."

CHAPTER FIVE

THE VERDICT

I

THE Court, packed to the point of suffocation, waited impatiently for the final *dénouement*.

Already three hours had passed since the jury had retired. The big clock over the Judge's dais continued slowly to tick off the minutes. It was the only impersonal thing in the Court; its bland expressionless face merely recorded Time; it was removed from every other consideration.

Three hours--and during the whole of that time only one incident of moment had occurred. That was when it became known to the "audience" of this absorbing drama that a message had been sent in to the Judge by the foreman of the jury, requesting further guidance on a certain point of law. What that point was, the spectators did not know, but speculation was diverse.

Tom, waiting with the rest of the Special Correspondents, could not keep his eyes off the empty dock. What would happen when Maud returned to it? Would she be allowed to go free, to continue her life, or would he have the unbearable anguish of hearing her sentenced to death? If allowed to go free, what would she make of the rest of her existence? Would she go on causing devastation amongst all those who came into contact with her?

He asked himself for the thousandth time why he had given himself this torture. Why hadn't he carried out his resolution and resigned? He had not replied to Whittier's letter, not knowing what to say. For he was still caught tightly in the old dilemma: it was a duel between his own wishes and his sense of duty. He would have liked nothing more than to have cast himself adrift from the *Banner*. This would have given him liberty of action. But had he possessed this freedom, he knew that he would have been unable to tear himself away from that cursed Court until the Trial came to an end. He simply had to see this thing through, he decided, as a result of two hours' earnest communion with himself after re-reading Whittier's letter.

During the following two days, he had moved like a figure in a dream; he had changed from a man into an automaton. Now he waited for the end, feeling that a hand was being pressed heavily upon his heart.

His neighbour on the left, the sob-sister from the *Sunday Recorder*, broke in upon his thoughts.

"Oh, how much longer are they going to be?" she complained querulously. "Why don't they come to a decision? They can't hang Slaney," she went on with an hysterical giggle; "she has a contract with us!"

Freshly disgusted with the whole sordid affair, Tom was ruder to her now than he had been throughout the Trial—and that was saying a great deal.

"For God's sake, shut up!" he replied; "to Hell with you and your contract! Don't you realize that two people's lives are at stake?"

"Of course I do. That's what makes it so exciting! You're a funny reporter; why, I believe you're in love with Slaney!"

This time he made no reply; any words he might have

uttered, he felt, would choke him.

In love with Maud? No, thank God; that phase had passed. Yet it was shocking to visualize that slim, beautiful throat being clasped by the hangman's noose.....

It was almost as shocking to remember the letter he had received from the office that morning. This had read:

Dear Farrar,—

I want you to get an interview with the woman Slaney after the verdict. She stands, I think, a very good chance of being acquitted. In any case, see Morrison Bent, her Counsel; show him this letter, if necessary—but get that interview. Use your personal influence. Slaney used to be a sweetheart of yours, didn't she?

*Yours faithfully,
Graham Loder.*

He had tossed the sheet of notepaper away after reading it. What a disgusting way in which to get a living! Well, once the Trial was over, he'd finish with it.

II

Now the moment had come. Word had come through that the jury had finished their long deliberations and were about to return to the Court. There was a stir of activity amongst the few officials. Their eyes shining, perspiration plainly visible on their faces, their hands clenched, the members of the public waited in close-gripped suspense.

With what seemed awful majesty, the Judge returned to the dais from his private room. Behind him walked his Chaplain, carrying that dread symbol, the square of black cloth.....

"Silence in Court!" called the Clerk.

So, with the stage set, the members of the jury could be seen filing back into their seats.

Shortly afterwards, first the heads, then the bodies, of the two prisoners became visible, as they were brought up from the cells below.

The woman came first. Every eye was upon her. She was pale, but still carried herself with a confident bearing. Those who were familiar with the continental casinos before the war,

might have compared her to one of the gamblers at the Billiard Tables. She looked like a woman who had played deliberately for a huge stake, and was sure that in the end she would win it.

Her fellow-prisoner, on the contrary, presented a pitiable spectacle. His mental and physical degeneration was now complete. He seemed to possess scarcely enough strength to drag his legs forward, whilst his face, sunken-hued, but with red, unhealthy blotches in the cheeks, twitched continuously. He stumbled as he was about to enter the dock, and a warder had to half drag him forward.

"Are you agreed on your verdict, members of the jury?" asked the Clerk.

"Yes." The foreman's voice reflected the mental strain he himself had undergone, but it could be clearly heard.

"Do you declare the female prisoner guilty or not guilty?"

There was a breathless pause.

"Not guilty."

The woman in the dock smiled. She had won her stake! Then, as though embracing the freedom that was now sure to come to her, she stretched her arms wide above her head. It was a symbolic gesture.

The Judge eyed her sternly.

"You can stand down, Mrs. Slaney," he said—and a warder opened the door of the dock and allowed her to pass out of that dreadful pen.

The Clerk turned to the foreman of the jury again.

"Do you find Basil Leadbeater guilty or not guilty?"

The foreman's voice broke as he whispered one terrible word—"Guilty."

"That is the verdict of you all?"

"Yes."

From somewhere at the back of the Court could be heard a woman's stifled sobbing.

CHAPTER SIX

AFTERMATH

I

M. R. IKE LABIN gestured with a pair of remarkably dirty hands.

"My dear Mrs. Slaney—" he started, but was sharply interrupted.

"I am Maud Latimer," he was told; "I hate the name of 'Slaney,' I have always hated it—and I shall not use it in future. Please remember I am Maud Latimer."

"Very well; it's just as you say, of course, my dear young lady," his eyes devouring her. "Now, suppose we get down to business?"

"Certainly. That's why I'm here," was the cool, incisive retort. He drew back a little. He had estimated that he wouldn't get everything his own way during the interview, but he hoped she wasn't going to be too difficult.

"Let me put the present position in a nut-shell, my dear Miss Latimer," he went on. "At the moment, you are a very prominent figure. The publicity you have received from the *Sunday Recorder* has brought you to the notice of millions of people. We must try to use that to the best advantage. If you place yourself unreservedly in my hands"—gesturing once again with those remarkably dirty paws of his—"I think I can promise you a very successful career in Pictures."

She asked him a direct question.

"Because I have been acquitted on a charge of murder, or because you think I have capabilities as an actress?"

"Both, my dear young lady! As I have already told you, I was present throughout the Trial, and,"—devouring her with his eyes again—"apart from your personal beauty, I came to the opinion that you could be trained into a wonderful screen actress. Why, you might even turn out to be another Madeline Lely!"

"Madeline Lely! I think she's just awful!" was the disconcerting answer; she always over-acts, and her voice sounds like a corn-crake."

Ike Labin stepped back. He might have received a slap in the face. This was sacrilege. Madeline Lely was one of the Cosmopolis Company's most successful stars; and he had had a direct interest in her promotion to stellar rank.

"I am sure I could be more successful than Madeline Lely," said this astonishing woman, "but I think it only fair to tell you that I shall expect a very large starting salary."

He stared at her. The little bitch! The nerve of her! Fancy daring to dictate terms at this early stage!

"Please don't let us misunderstand each other at the very beginning, Miss Latimer," he managed to reply.

She shrugged her beautiful shoulders.

"There's no need for any misunderstanding, providing you appreciate the real position. As you have just told me, I am one of the best-known young women in the world at the present time, and to use one of your own American expressions, I am determined to 'cash-in' on the situation. I should be a fool if I didn't."

He coughed. He would have liked to spit, but he restrained himself.

"Yes, that's true," he remarked, "but I would remind you that you have had no experience whatever of acting for the films—"

He was sharply interrupted.

"So your idea is merely to take advantage of my present publicity; and when that has died down, you'll leave me high and dry!" She smiled. "It won't do, Mr. Labin; and so I don't think I need waste any more of your time. As a matter of fact, I have a letter in my bag," patting it, "from the Emporia Film Company; they want me to call on them at twelve o'clock. I thought I'd look in on you first—"

Labin's face became contorted. What a bitch she was! Holding a pistol at his head like this, when he had gone out of his way to put her on the map! But he mustn't let her go to the Emporia people; the Hollywood office would never forgive him; and Jake Coresby, the European Manager of the Emporia, was his bitterest rival and enemy. No, he mustn't let her leave this room before he got her signature.

Holding in one of his dirty hands a gold cigarette-case, he extended it towards her.

"Have a cigarette," he said in a conciliatory tone.

She shook her head.

"Thank you, I don't smoke." Her voice was like steel.

He belched gustily. Accustomed to every trick of his questionable trade, he now felt in danger of being "twisted" himself.

"Well, tell me, Miss Latimer, what is your idea of a starting salary with my Company?" he enquired, endeavouring to impart a cooing inflection into his voice.

The answer made him fall back in his chair.

"I should want at least £300 a week," she said.

Having first gasped, he then gaped at her.

"£300 a week?" he replied; "you must be joking!"

She rose gracefully from her chair.

"I was afraid you had brought me here just to waste my time. Good morning, Mr. Labin."

For so obese a man, Labin showed remarkable agility in reaching the door before her.

"Not so fast," he entreated; "don't be so hasty, Miss Latimer. Come and sit down again."

She eyed him as though he were something she had found beneath a stone.

"You've heard my terms; I see no reason for prolonging this talk. It cannot lead anywhere—and I'm due at the Emporium Office at twelve o'clock." With that she attempted to walk past him.

But, with the perspiration now pouring down his face, he stared the way.

"Not so fast," he repeated; "if I am willing to discuss the matter further, surely you should be? Come and sit down." He shook off the hand he laid on her arm, but so far relented to return to the visitor's chair on the other side of the big mahogany desk.

"Now I want you to be sensible, Miss Latimer," he said while he had regained his own seat. "I admire you for putting a value on yourself, of course, but £300 a week is a preposterous salary to ask without any acting experience; you must see that for yourself. I am not saying you wouldn't be worth it in a month's time—frankly, I believe you would—but, before I agree to pay you such terms, I should have to cable Hollywood."

"How long before the reply came back?" she asked curtly.

"Well, it's all according how long Hollywood took to con-

the matter. If they refused, they would probably reply straightaway; on the other hand, if they are prepared to give it attention, they'll have to go into conference——"

"It's so absurd!" came the contemptuous retort; "why should I wait for your people to go into conference? I've only to walk along the street and see the Emporia Company."

Ike Labin thought he was going mad. He did actually begin to clutch convulsively the little hair he had left. His face was distorted; he became an object for pity. But, instead of feeling sorry for the man, Maud Latimer showed by her expression that she had only contempt for this grotesque creature.

"Take it or leave it!" she said curtly; "I shan't accept a penny less."

"Oh, God!" he breathed to himself; and then to the woman: "All right! I'll take a chance! I'll pay you the three hundred a week!" His voice was hysterical.

"I shall require a year's contract."

The scream of mingled rage and baffled pride (Ike Labin was proud that Wardour Street's nickname for him was "The Twister") could no longer be restrained: flinging his head back, he gave full vent to his feelings. The visitor waited until the paroxysm had somewhat subsided.

Then: "Well, what is your answer?"

"I'll get my secretary to type a temporary contract," he said, looking as though he could kill her; "that will be binding on both sides until a full legal document is prepared. I hope now that you are satisfied?"

"Yes, I am satisfied—but, of course, my own solicitor will have to go through the final contract. Good morning, Mr. Labin; I shall be staying at the Gordon Hotel until further notice."

Perhaps Ike Labin was still suffering from shock: at any rate, he forgot his manners sufficiently to remain in his chair. He watched the door close behind the visitor, and then burst into a flood of lurid profanity.

II

The London Press had been invited to meet Maud Latimer.

The reception, held at the Astoria Hotel, Park Lane's latest and most hideous monstrosity, was being attended by over a hundred journalists. Most of these (a very mixed bag indeed)

were writers on film subjects, but there were also a number of columnists and society gossipers. A cynical and hard-boiled lot, a dozen or so were gathered around the beaming Ike Labin and roasting him unmercifully.

"You've got a nerve, Ike," drawled Phyllis Titmuss, whose Film Column in the *Evening Post* was so undeservedly popular. "planting this murderess on us."

The European representative of Cosmopolis patted the speaker's shoulder.

"Now, now, Phyllis, darling," he wheezed, "that's libellous. Maud Latimer was acquitted of murdering her husband, and she had heard you say what you did just now, she could have sued you for criminal libel—and, by God, she would!"

"She's a cold-blooded bitch!" returned the film-writer.

Hector Grimwade of the *Daily Meteor* chuckled.

"Trust a woman to tear another woman to pieces," he said. "Having lost all possible faith in human nature whatever, I can only congratulate you, Ike, on having done a very good stroke of business. All the same, I hope for your own sake she hasn't got you for too long a contract."

Labin stood up to the blow very well. Since that fateful interview in his office, during which he had received so many shocks, he had had some disturbed hours. And no wonder! forced against a wall, he had committed himself to pay out no less a sum than £15,600! The cable he had received from Hollywood in reply to this announcement had almost turned him blind.

Everything had depended on the film test—and, thank goodness, Maud Latimer had come through this successfully. It had softened the blow considerably. Now, everything depended on whether the acting she had done during the murder trial would be sustained when she actually faced the camera.

Meanwhile, everything was going well. The Press had come flocking to this reception. It had meant spending a good deal of money, of course, but the miles of newspaper publicity which would result would more than pay for that. It would set Maud Latimer (as the new "star" still preferred to be known) definitely on the screen map, just as before she had been stamped on the public consciousness. These two forces would make her appeal to the cinema-going public irresistible, he felt certain. Ike Labin knew his Press boys and girls. He knew that the

had come full of cynical speculation, but that didn't matter : they had come. This was all that counted.

After the drinks had been thoroughly sampled, Maud herself entered at the right psychological moment. She was exquisitely gowned, and looked, as in the dock, entirely mistress of herself. She might, indeed, have been one of Hollywood's current celebrities receiving her natural homage.

Labin watched the press cameras being trained upon her, and noted with increased satisfaction the different journalists reluctantly admiring her colossal nerve.

Then he took control.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, raising his voice, "Miss Latimer will be pleased to answer any questions you may care to put to her."

Inside the *Banner* Office a scene of an entirely different kind was being enacted. Tom Farrar was facing the Editor, in Alan Bickersdyke's private room, and the two were quarrelling furiously.

Tom was not worrying. The only regret he felt was that he had not possessed sufficient moral courage to have brought about this climax earlier; he bitterly reproached himself that he had not lived up to his early resolve, and left this newspaper, which, although it had given him his chance in Fleet Street journalism, had caused him so much acute mental disquietude in the various assignments to which he had been sent, culminating in the Burminster Trial.

He had returned to Fleet Street from his native town feeling sick, not only with his job, but with himself. He was torn with doubt: if he left the *Banner*, he might find it very difficult to get another job—men far more brilliantly gifted than himself had known what it was to be out of work for months on end, so many were the applicants and so few the jobs available. At the same time, apart from his own feelings, he felt he would have to leave, if only because the three Chiefs of the *Banner*—namely, Bickersdyke himself, Graham Loder, the News Editor, and James Whittier, the Night-news Editor—were probably fed-up and disappointed in him. He knew his stuff from Burminster had not been good; in some ways, he had consequently let his paper down—an unforgivable offence; but the principal bone of

contention was that he had not secured the interview with Maud Latimer after she had been acquitted.

Bickersdyke returned to this controversial subject now.

"We are all very disappointed in you, Farrar," he snapped; "your Latimer trial stuff was very bad, and on top of that, you let us down over that interview with the woman."

"I have already tried to explain about that," Tom replied; "Mrs. Slaney had been tied up with the *Sunday Recorder* under contract, and, as Sir Morrison Bent told me himself, she was not free to speak to any other newspaperman."

"Oh, to hell with that for an excuse!" retorted Bickersdyke savagely; "aren't you supposed to be a reporter? You had a personal 'pull' with the woman—why, you actually used to be a sweetheart of hers, didn't you?—and as a result you could have got anything out of her that you wanted. Don't try to pull the wool over my eyes."

"I don't want to pull the wool over your eyes, Mr. Bickersdyke," he said; "all I want to do is to resign from the *Banner*."

Well, it was out now, and he was glad. The suspense was over; he could breathe freely once again, something which he had not been able to do for the past ten days. Ever since he had returned from Burminster, the atmosphere in the office had been so tense that he hated going into the place.

Bickersdyke smiled. It was a smile full of meaning. It showed that he was satisfied.

"Very well; I'll instruct the cashier to give you three months' salary, and then get out—you've let the paper down and that's a thing I can never forgive."

Two hours later, the usual afternoon Editorial Conference was taking place in the *Banner* Office. There were present the Editor, the News Editor, the Night-news Editor (who had just come on duty), the Chief Sub-editor, the Features Editor, the Chief Leader Writer and other lesser luminaries. The subject under immediate discussion was how the latest Maud Latimer story should be handled. The *Banner's* Film Writer, a young woman of 26, had given a verbal account of the reception to the prospective new film star, and the story had lost nothing in the sarcastic way she had told it.

At the end, Bickersdyke had spoken.



murderess into a popular film-star—just because she is a murderess?" I tell you, Bickersdyke, here is a chance to run a campaign which will give us more publicity than anything we have done for years! And, if you want any further reason, we can claim the credit of scotching this rotten scheme, and at the same time get our own back on the *Sunday Recorder*."

Bickersdyke lit a fresh cigarette.

"It's an idea," he conceded; "you are proposing, I suppose, Graham, that we let McHenry do a Special on the Front Page?"

"That's exactly what I do propose."

"Well, Whittier?" The Editor looked towards his left.

The Night-news Editor smiled.

"You are a clever swine, Loder. I hate your guts, as you know, but you are a clever swine.....Yes, Bickersdyke," he went on, "you have my vote for it."

"And you, Willis?" turning to the Chief Sub-editor.

"I am with you, too."

"Then it's settled."

"But you realize, all of you, I hope, that this will do us serious harm with the Cosmopolis people?" ventured the Advertising Manager. "They will refuse to advertise with us any more—and the rest of the film companies may follow suit."

"Rot! They can't afford to do without the *Banner*!" retorted Graham Loder. "With a circulation of over two and a half millions a day, how can they afford to stop advertising?"

The recalcitrant member of the Conference shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't see why I should always be the one to hold the bloody baby!" he declared with unexpected heat, and, getting up abruptly from his seat at the table, he flung himself out of the room.

III

Boyle McHenry was an Irishman. Also, he was a master of English prose. The trouble was—as he was apt to admit in his cups, which were frequent—he had put his great gifts to a base purpose; instead of writing books which posterity would have acclaimed, he prostituted his pen, and became a hireling of popular journalism.

He was getting on now, and the twenty years he had spent in

I PROTEST.

By BOYLE McHENRY.

In the name of millions of readers of this paper, I protest!

I protest, first of all, against the unblushing shamelessness of a certain very famous American Film Company at having the audacity to endeavour to promote a woman who has so recently stood in the dock on a charge of murdering her husband, into a film star. The name of that woman I will not mention, but it is on everybody's lips at the present time.

I protest, secondly, against this colossal piece of bad taste, if only on the grounds that many talented young women, whose good looks, acting ability and other qualities might very well turn them into film stars if they had not been ruthlessly elbowed aside in order to make room for a woman whose sole attribute to screen fame would appear to be the publicity arising out of her recent appearance in the dock. True, the woman in question was acquitted of the grave charge she had to face, but, nevertheless, her exploitation in this way (those of you who wish to be nauseated, as I am myself, should turn to Page One of this paper for further details), is nothing short of scandalous.

I protest, thirdly, because I consider that this woman should not be permitted to flaunt herself anymore in public, but should be allowed to sink back into the obscurity from which she arose when charged with the murder of her husband.

There was a lot more—but these were the salient points. He wound up with the following words:

Finally, if only in the name of Christian decency, I implore the Film Company in question to reconsider their plans; but I also warn them, on behalf of the great masses for whom I have the honour to write, that if they fail to take this advice, such a storm of passionate indignation will arise that any film in which this woman may appear will be universally banned—and not only utterly banned but utterly damned.

The article fulfilled its purpose: it created the sensation that was anticipated.

Millions of people read it at the breakfast table, in the train, going to business, and in various offices. These included the

private sanctum of Ike Labin, European Manager of Cosmopolis Films.

He had scarcely scanned the first few paragraphs of the tirade when he emitted an anguished yell.

His secretary—a spectacular blonde—came running into the office.

"Why, Mr. Labin," she exclaimed, scarlet finger-nails prominently displayed; "whatever is the matter? Aren't you feeling well?"

He could not reply in words; instead, he pointed to the newspaper on his desk.

His secretary, used to his idiosyncrasies, picked up the paper obediently. The first few words were enough. Beneath her make up, her face blanched. She had received a grievous blow this meant, not merely to her credit but to his plan. Secretly, she sympathized with the protesters, but she had her duty. She knew that, with Labin in his present mood, the protest was likely to be a hectic one.

So, in common with many, she was a hypocrite.

"What a beautiful article," she murmured, "but, then, nobody is likely to take any notice of it." "Boyle McHenry writes, are they? He can stop that," he growled; "don't you remember how he got that book, *Defiance of Youth*, banned last month?"

Her employer started to tear at his collar and tie; he seemed on the point of having an apoplectic fit.

"Get Simon Levinsky," he managed to gasp, pointing to the telephone.

"Yes, Mr. Labin."

Ten minutes later, a plump, middle-aged man of pronouncedly Jewish appearance walked into the room. His clothes were expensive and well-fitting, representing a triumph for his tailor, his hair was well oiled, his smile was disarming, but his eyes were keen and shifty. Simon Levinsky was the solicitor who looked after the interests of the Cosmopolis Film Corporation so far as its ramifications on this side of the Atlantic were concerned, and he had need of all his faculties.

Labin, still looking as though he had passed through a hurricane and had sustained considerable damage, pointed to a chair. By this time he had removed his

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISHING-UP THE DIRT

MAUD LATIMER read the McHenry article whilst she was breakfasting in bed at the Gordon Hotel. Her reaction was swift and overwhelming. Anyone coming upon her unexpectedly at that moment would, without any knowledge of her previous history, have summed her up as a very dangerous woman—one, in fact, who was not likely to stop at anything in order to satisfy her sense of revenge, or to obtain what she wanted in any other direction.

Her chagrin was so devastating that, after the first shock of horrified surprise had passed, she pushed the breakfast tray on to one side, jumped out of bed, and immediately started to dress. She had to see about this at once. It was characteristic of the development of her nature that once she had tasted the preliminary sweets of approaching film fame, she should fasten on to this new career with a tenacity that brooked no obstacle. It was just the same when she took the plunge into immorality: until she accepted the overtures of Basil Leadbeater, sex had never played an important part in her life, but once she stepped over the borderline, she did not count the cost.

Pausing in her dressing, she took up the telephone receiver by the side of the bed and got through to Hector McIlwaine. The latter was the solicitor who had put through the *Sunday Recorder* contract, and directly she had met him she decided that he was just the type of man to act for her once she was a free woman again. McIlwaine was a stoutly-built, heavy-featured man of fifty. He conveyed an impression of monumental strength. He had a habit with women clients of patting them on the shoulder and saying in effect: "Now, don't worry, little lady; leave it all to me; I'll see you safely through this trouble." He was a hard worker, and, when the occasion demanded it, entirely unscrupulous in his tactics. It is doubtful if he would have held the appointment to the *Sunday Recorder* unless he had been willing to deviate from the strict legal path when required.

The time was 10 a. m., and he had just entered his office in Lincoln's Inn Fields when his new client's message came through. He attended to it himself. Hector McIlwaine had an eye for a pretty woman.

He listened attentively to the excited voice at the other end, and then said soothingly: "Now, you mustn't excite yourself, dear lady. Just because some stupid journalist has dared to write this article, it doesn't mean that all your hopes are ruined. Jump into a taxi," he went on in a slightly sharper tone, "and come round to the office. We will have a little talk first and then go and see this Labin fellow."

"It won't affect the contract, will it?" he was asked.

"Of course not!" was the reply.

"Because I'll fight him tooth and nail—the dirty little Jew!"

The solicitor smiled as he heard the receiver being pushed back viciously on to its hook. Women! Well, if there were no women, there would be very little litigation. How would the divorce lawyers get a living without women, for instance?

His client arrived within ten minutes—she must have got to a taxi straightaway—and burst into his private room without ceremony.

"I've been thinking," she started at once, "is there anything pellous in that article?"

He waved her to a chair.

"You must try to be patient, dear lady; I haven't had time to read it yet. We don't have the *Banner* in this office, but," trying to soothe her again with a wave of his hand, "I've sent out for a copy. Ah!" as the door opened, "here it is now."

He pushed over the silver box on his desk, but she refused a cigarette.

"I'll go through this very carefully; please sit down there," he said, pointing to the chair beside his desk.

This time she consented, and for the next five minutes nothing was heard but the sound of the solicitor occasionally clearing his throat. She could gather nothing from the expression on his face; this remained unreadable.

At last, when she thought he had come to an end, she lost her patience.

"Well, can I sue him for libel?" she demanded.

He shook his head.

"No."

"Why not?" she asked passionately.

"Because, my dear Miss Latimer, the *Banner* would not have printed anything that was libellous. I may as well tell you now that no newspaper prints a line of matter these days that has not been most carefully scrutinized by a number of qualified legal men."

"But it *must* be libellous," she persisted; "look at the foul things he has said about me! Although I have been acquitted, he actually calls me a 'murderess.'"

Again the heavy head was shaken.

"There's no ground for an action, Miss Latimer, I can assure you; if there were, I wouldn't lose a moment. As a matter of fact, I should rather like to be able to sue the *Banner* for libel—but this," picking up the paper, "is not the time to do it. No," he continued, rising from his chair and smoothing his waistcoat over his ample torso, "the better plan is for you to come with me and see this Labin fellow. No doubt he is expecting us."

They were received by the spectacular blonde secretary.

"What name, please?" she enquired haughtily.

"You know who I am very well!" angrily retorted Maud Latimer before McIlwaine could say a word; "go in there," pointing to the door of Ike Labin's private room, "and tell Mr. Labin that Miss Latimer and her solicitor are here."

"Oh, very well," drawled the S.B., and, swaying her hips provocatively, she walked away.

"She knew me very well! Why did she pretend that I was a stranger?" Maud snapped at McIlwaine.

The latter frowned.

"I don't like the look of this," he replied. "It seems to me that Labin is trying to put over a fast one."

"You mean he's trying to rat on us?"

"I shouldn't be surprised."

The spectacular blonde reappeared.

"Mr. Labin is very busy, Miss Latimer, but he can give you just five minutes."

"He'll give me as much time as I want—and you can go back and tell him so."

But now Hector McIlwaine took command.

"You tell him, Simon," said Labin, looking at his solicitor. Levinsky stopped in the act of lighting a cigar.

"Surely you're not trying to frighten us, Mac?" he said, a crafty smile on his full lips.

"Frighten you! Certainly not! We have just come here for information."

"Well, I can give you that," was the reply; "and the first item to be supplied is that this article"—here he took up a copy of the *Banner*—"is likely to have the most damaging effect on Miss Latimer's proposed career as a film actress. As a man of the world, and as a recognized expert on newspaper publicity, you will appreciate that, I have no doubt."

"I intend to deal with the *Banner* in my own good time," was the answer; "what I want to do at the moment is to inform you that Miss Latimer expects the contract she signed in your office yesterday morning to be honoured to the final letter."

Ike Labin coughed. He looked again at his solicitor.

"Circumstances not only alter cases, but even contracts, Mac," remarked Simon Levinsky.

"For God's sake, don't call me 'Mac,'" replied the Scotsman, relaxing his guard for a moment; "but tell me, Levinsky, what do you exactly mean by that? Are you suggesting that you don't intend to honour the contract?"

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm afraid we shall soon be powerless in the matter."

"It's only fair to tell you that if you don't, by God, I'll sue you!"

"I'm sorry to hear you say that. Labin, have you got a copy of the contract by you?"

With the alacrity he displayed in producing it, one might well have supposed that the film *impresario* had carefully placed a copy on his desk beforehand. In any case, after a brief imaginary fumbling amongst his papers, he held up a legal-looking document.

"You might look at Clause 17, McIlwaine," smiled Levinsky.

McIlwaine concealed his anger. He, shrewd old legal fox, knew himself to be, had been outwitted. He should have fought still harder against that damnable clause being included. He could see that now. At the time the contract had been drawn he had not foreseen the hidden danger in the simple-looking

CHAPTER EIGHT

SHOW BUSINESS

I

THE *Banner* campaign increased in ferocity. For a whole week—which is a long time for any newspaper to “run” one subject, however pet it is—it fulminated against the “bad taste,” as it put it, of turning a woman who had been charged with murdering her husband into a public entertainer. Letters continued to pour into the office in ever-increasing volume—one day no fewer than 30,000 arrived, it was reported—and long before the end of the week, Maud Latimer realized that she had lost. Indeed, she knew now she had been defeated even before she had started to give battle.

But she would not have been true to herself if this check, serious as it was, had not stimulated her to a yet greater effort. The virus had entered her system; if she could not get into the Show Business (she had now adopted the slang term of the Entertainment World) by one door, she would enter it by another. It wanted careful planning, but she was convinced she could do it. What was more, she was determined to do it. She had her back to the wall, but hadn't she proved already she was a fighter?

The Chester Grill was crowded with its customary *clientèle*. The Chester Grill was the London equivalent of the famous Twenty-One Restaurant in New York; that is to say, it attracted distinguished novelists, playwrights, film stars, play producers, film producers, and the various magnates of the Show Business. They all congregated about midnight in order to scratch each other's backs, and whisper slanderous gossip out of the corners of their mouths. To the mordant student of human nature, it was a richly-satisfying spectacle.

The company this evening was especially eclectic. This was not surprising since most of them had come on from what had been expected to prove a very distinguished First Night, but had turned out, as so often happened, to be a pronounced “flop.” As the author in question was perhaps the most famous playwright

of a former generation, congratulations were almost universal: the "knockers" were *in excelsis*. The dissenting element consisted of a small group in one corner of the Grill composed of the Manager, the producer of the play, and the two disconsolate backers. They received many condolences—practically all of them insincere.

At precisely five minutes past midnight, a striking-looking young woman of outstanding beauty entered alone. As women did not go unaccompanied to the Chester Grill, her entrance would have excited comment in any case, but when the whisper spread: "It's the Latimer woman—you know, the murderess person," practically all conversation hushed, and, amidst an almost spellbound silence, the newcomer walked to a table on which the sign "Reserved" had been placed.

Apparently quite oblivious of the sensation she was causing, the woman sat down at the small table—it was one intended for only two persons—and, picking up the *menu*, studied it with what seemed well-bread ease. Then, with a waiter hovering expectantly with pencil and pad, she selected a number of dishes, and sat back, surveying the scene as though this was a second First Night.

Maud Latimer—for it was she—found it not only amusing but exciting. It was exactly as she had pictured the scene. For nearly a week now, she had been anticipating this very moment.

She had schemed it all out. If she wished to fulfil her ambition—that was to get into the Show Business, and this she was determined upon at no matter what cost—she knew she would have to go where "show" people met. And not the riff-raff like Ike Labin, but the real Upper Crust: the men who actually engaged actors and actresses; the men who either leased or owned theatres; the men who wrote the plays on commission for famous actors and actresses—all those, in short, who really pulled the strings.

It had meant hard work. To begin with, she had to have the right clothes. Formerly, she had dressed neatly, but in a more or less middle-class fashion; but now, she went in a hired Rolls Royce to the most distinguished *couturière* in Mayfair. Madam Schempi was a genius. She had risen from practically nothing to owning four big establishments in Paris, New York, Havana and London. At the moment she was in London—and, by a

fortunate chance for Maud, she was at 997 Brook Street, when the hired Rolls-Royce drew up.

It was an excited assistant who told her the news.

"Madam," this girl said, "who do you think is coming into the *salon*? The Latimer woman—you know, the one who was charged with murdering her husband and got away with it!"

Helene Schempi was a woman first and a dressmaker afterwards. Perhaps that was why she had achieved such an extraordinary success. At any rate, she was intrigued by the information. In her early days in Paris, she often used to visit the Underworld, accompanied by a male friend, and since coming to London, she had pursued her further enquiries into the world's criminal quarters. Now that she was actually about to meet a woman who had narrowly escaped being hanged, she felt herself thrilling at the prospect.

"If she wants anything, bring her to me," she ordered.

"Very well, Madam."

Thus it was that when the new customer stated her desire to be "dressed by Schempi," the famous *couturière* was graciousness itself.

"I shall be most happy," she said. "Madam is just my type. She will do justice to my creations. Already, I can see....."

"You needn't be afraid of not being paid," said the visitor bluntly. "My Bank is the Eastminster, and if you care to ring through to the Strand Branch, I think they will satisfy you about that."

The *couturière* shrugged her thin shoulders.

"Money is necessary—but with an artist like myself it is not the first essential. And now suppose you tell me exactly what you want?"

Maud remained in the Brook Street establishment for nearly two hours. It was perhaps the most fascinating two hours of her life so far. Her order had amounted to nearly £500, but she felt that the money was being well spent. And, after all, she had still over £20,000 to call upon.....She was out to conquer, and she must go into the fight properly equipped.

She was wearing at the Chester Grill the first of the Schempi creations—an evening frock of dark blue velvet so simply cut and yet so artistically designed, that every woman in the room knew that the newcomer was "Schempi dressed."

Amongst those who kept looking at Maud Latimer was Laidley Mortimer. In spite of his name, Mortimer was a Hebrew. He had once been a box-office attendant in the same theatre which he now owned—the Majestic. A man of forty-eight, he had achieved his success by a combination of quick-wittedness, real *flair* for the Theatre, a reasonable absence of scrupulous dealing and a succession of lucky "hits." Three plays in succession had filled his theatre for as many years.

But, as Show Business sometimes brings easy money (when one is fortunate), so it brings corresponding heavy losses when the luck turns. Mortimer's star had been descending for some time; the last three plays he had produced had all died within a few nights. People were already asking if he was "through."

At the moment, he was in a black mood. Not only was his business luck out, but his personal affairs were in Queer Street. The actress who had been his mistress for the past six months—a woman he had loved as sincerely as any man of his type could be expected to love a woman—had gone over to a rival producer; as a matter of fact, she was now sitting with this man—David Templemore—only three tables away!

Mortimer, consequently, was in a dangerous emotional state. A man of quick impulses and sudden violent passions, he was capable of anything that night.

His companion, a well-known actor, recognizing the storm wisely kept silent. He, too, had been attracted by the beauty of the beautiful stranger, and had remarked to himself how the theatrical manager's eyes had turned in that direction.

He was, therefore, not very surprised when Maud Latimer, a waiter for the loan of a pencil and a book, came forward with a piece of paper which he tore off from the book.

"Take that to the lady sitting alone," said the waiter, and said to the man.

The actor still said nothing. If he had said anything, any comment, there would have been a storm. Mortimer was not in the mood to be provoked.

A minute later Maud Latimer came back. These ran:

Could you call at my office to-morrow (Monday, Wednesday, day)?

This brief message was signed by a man she knew to be the owner of a famous theatre.

Looking up, she caught Mortimer's eye.

She smiled—and nodded.

Laidley Mortimer looked at his visitor with slumberous but keenly-appraising eyes as she sat down. She had kept the appointment to the minute. That was a good sign—it showed she was keen.

"You found your way here all right, then, Miss Latimer?" he started, giving her the name by which he had heard she liked to be known.

She smiled at him across the few feet of space that separated them.

"It doesn't take much intelligence to find the office of one of the most famous theatrical managers in London, Mr. Mortimer," she replied.

He had been about to light a cigar—the first of the day—when, overcome by a sudden fit of good manners, he thrust the temptation away from him, shutting down the lid of the cedar-wood box.

"Thank you for a very nice compliment." There was a brief silence. He eyed her again. She might be a murderess—he didn't care if she were—but she was an astonishingly attractive woman; and nothing would content him until he had slept with her. But first he had to know exactly what was in her mind.

"I dare say you were surprised when I sent you that note at the Chester Grill last night, Miss Latimer?"

She shrugged.

"Nothing surprises me very much. But I felt flattered."

"Why?"

"Because," leaning forward, and giving him the full benefit of the beauty which she knew was the real cause of her being there that morning, "I want to go on the stage. That may sound amusing to you—how many times you must have heard it in the course of your career!—but entirely without experience as I am, I really believe I can act. I have already had one great disappointment, but I am determined to go on. If I can't get on the screen, I will get on the stage—as a matter of fact, I would prefer the stage."

This was extremely interesting. In the ordinary way—that was to say, if the speaker had been an ordinary woman—he would probably have made some caustic comment, reaching out to press the bell on his desk and getting the tiresome creature out of his room as quickly as possible, afterwards soundly berating his secretary for allowing her to get past the outer office.

But the present situation was entirely different. For one thing, he was determined to possess this woman as quickly as possible—the very sight of her set his blood tingling—and for another, there might be something in what she said. Barred from the screen, as the result of the *Banner's* screaming hysteria, would Public Opinion also bar her from the Theatre? That was the point. In any case, he was intrigued.

"You've been frank with me, Miss Latimer, and I am going to be frank with you," he said, returning look for look. "You've been good enough to describe me as one of the best-known theatrical managers in London. That's true. But what is also true is that at the moment my luck seems dead out. I don't know if your interest in the stage has lasted very long, but if it has, you'll probably remember that my last three plays have been unsuccessful. That means that I have lost a considerable amount of money—practically all my available capital, in fact. Oh," he went on, smiling, "you mustn't think that because my name has been on the play bills for so many years as a Manager that I am a rich man. Nothing of the sort. Not many managers are these days. It's quite different from thirty or forty years ago when there was less competition and when the Theatre was much better organized. Then, very sound fortunes—fortunes in those days, at least—could be made in the Theatre. Nowadays most of us managers have to depend for our production costs—and damned heavy they are, let me tell you!—on professional backers; financiers, in short. I dare say you are wondering why I'm telling you all this," he broke off suddenly.

She gave him an honest reply.

"I'm very interested. Go on, please."

"Thank you." He was beginning to like the woman, apart altogether from the physical yen he had for her. She was an entirely different type from Sybil Hatherton, the actress who had recently left him for a rival producer. "When I see a person—and I shouldn't have written to you last night if I hadn't had

you on sight, Miss Latimer—I'm inclined to be honest. No that I pose as a particularly good specimen of the human race—who is, these days?—but between friends, and I hope we are going to be friends, I always believe in cards on the table. Don't you?"

"I do. That's why I like your frankness."

"All right! Now we understand each other, and I want you to believe that anything I say to you is entirely above-board. Consequently, when I tell you that at the moment I don't know which way to turn for money (my usual professional backers have got temporary cold feet!), please believe that it's the truth."

"How much money do you want?" The words had slipped out before she realized what she had said; but now she had uttered them, she had no regret. During the early part of the Trial, she had sustained her fortitude and kept her confidence by picturing the life she would lead on the French Riviera on the £20,000 that would come to her directly the Law set her free; but the rioting newspaper-publicity that had accompanied her acquittal had made this mental vision pale and sink into insignificance. She could no longer picture herself living in some shabby pension, or even second-class hotel (the income from the £20,000, even when securely invested, would only yield her a few hundreds a year in these days of ruinous taxation); no, she was destined for bigger and better things than that. The virus of notoriety, now that it had entered her system, could not be expelled. She wanted to continue in the fierce blaze of the limelight. That was why she had made the last remark.

Mortimer reached out and took her hand. She suffered it to remain in his clasp. He made no attempt to fondle the soft flesh of anyone who did not know the man would have said that it was an instinctive act of friendship. That, and nothing more.

"It will surprise you, my dear, to know how many millions of pounds have been lost in theatrical speculation," he said.

"Is that meant as a warning?"

"I'm speaking as a friend. I didn't ask you here to try to interest you in some get-rich-quick investment in the Theatre. That would have been a pretty low-down trick in my opinion."

Gently—so gently that the movement could not be taken amiss—she withdrew her hand from his.

ing along Bond Street looking at the shops, shall I?"
"That will be fine," he returned.

Laidley Mortimer was not a sentimentalist; he was a sensualist, predatory and unscrupulous, but now as his eyes rested on the graceful figure walking up and down his office, the sensualist became merged into the man of the Theatre. For Mortimer was undoubtedly that; right back from his earliest beginnings, he had had his dreams and seen his visions. All these had centred on producing his own shows in the West End of London. And, by a combination of luck, native genius and relentless hard work, he had finally achieved his desire. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he had a real *flair* for the Theatre; indeed, he had been known occasionally to risk thousands of pounds of his own money in order to put on a play that appealed to him artistically but which he knew would only achieve commercial success by a most amazing fluke.

He had always been willing to back his judgment. Until the recent run of phenomenal bad luck, this had served him well. Once he had promoted a girl with only a few lines to speak, to take over at short notice the principal rôle in that amazing success, *A Duchess Must Live*—and that same night, Stella Trant, the girl in question, had become a star. What was more, she had never looked back; she was now in America under the management of Oscar Hammersfeld, earning two thousand dollars a week playing the lead in *It Is Only My Way*.

This Latimer girl! Shelving all thought of his physical desire for the moment, he tried to estimate whether, as a result of relentless tuition, she could be turned into an actress within a few weeks. She had beauty of face and figure and grace of movement. Her voice, too, was low and distinctive, although there was a trace of commonness in it. But that could be eradicated, of course.

Suddenly, he came to a decision.

"That'll do—don't tire yourself, my dear. Now sit down again. Thank you very much," as she complied.

"I'm going to be quite honest with you," he went on; "if I weren't, I shouldn't be your friend. You tell me you're really keen on getting on the stage. You tell me also that you'd be prepared to work hard; night and day, if needs be. Well, you'll have to work night and day. If I may say so, you are an extre-

mely attractive young woman, but I could go out into the streets of London any day and put my hand on a thousand attractive young women—you must know that."

Her manner hardened.

"Well?" she almost snapped.

"Now, don't get cross with me; you mustn't lose your temper. Tempers in the Theatre get lost quickly enough without our quarrelling before ever we make a start. The point I am trying to make is this: that, although you have certain external advantages, that doesn't make you an actress. An actress is born; but, occasionally, she can be made. I believe in your case that you may have a natural dramatic ability which only requires proper tuition to be brought out. But you mustn't think, my dear, that you can become a star overnight: you will have to start at the bottom, as it were, and work upwards."

"I should be prepared to do that."

"Good! Now, if I may say so, you're being a sensible girl. And there is this question of your name. Again, you see, I'm being entirely honest—almost brutal, in fact. That film contract you had with the Cosmopolis people fell through because of the *Banner* campaign, I take it?"

"Yes," she said between clenched teeth; "and my fool of a solicitor was afraid to bring an action."

"No doubt he was a wise man. Newspapers don't print things these days which bring them within sight of the Law Courts; they are too careful.....And now to continue what I was saying: I don't think it would be advisable for you to start your stage career under 'Maud Latimer.' Later, perhaps, if you were still keen on it——"

"I am. After all, it's my name—and I have done nothing to sully it."

Mentally he cursed her for being such a fool. Hadn't she any sense? Didn't she realize that in hundreds of thousands of respectable middle-class people there was nothing short of anathema?

But he thought it

"Yes, my dear, but even the Censor might want people to co-

"All right; I leave

Twenty minutes later Maud Latimer left the office of Mortimer, theatrical producer. She carried under her left arm a large manila envelope. This contained a copy of the script of Richard Arden's new comedy, *Life is Like That*.

Meanwhile, on Mortimer's desk lay a cheque for £200. This was drawn on the Strand Branch of the Eastminster Bank, and was signed "Maud Latimer."

II

"Hello, young feller-me-lad!" Lifting his head, Tom Farrar looked with haggard eyes at the owner of the voice which had broken in upon his miserable cogitations. It was Raymond Hurlbut.

"Where have you been?" the famous playwright asked, dropping on to the seat by the side of the reporter; "I've been trying to find you for weeks now. I wrote you twice at your old address; didn't you get my letters?"

Tom did not know what to say. He was ashamed to talk about his present plight. Ever since he had left the *Banner*, he had been under a cloud. The story of his dismissal must have gone the rounds of Fleet Street, for, although he made no attempt to get another job—he was sick of reporting—the articles he had sent to various newspapers had been invariably rejected. Perhaps they were bad—no doubt they were—but, in any case, no Fleet Street Editor had indicated the slightest interest in his future. Each manuscript had been returned, accompanied by the customary formal printed slip; the usual "Editor regrets...."

Hurlbut, lighting a cigarette, took another sidelong look at his companion. He liked the boy, and was only too anxious to do what he could for him. But the situation was difficult. He knew the pride of youth, and how easily it could be bruised. He would have to be tactful.

"I'm just going back to my rooms for lunch; what are you coming along?" he said in a tone that he tried to make sound free of any embarrassment.

Farrar smiled wryly.

"I'm scarcely in the mood to be made a fuss of, Mr. B. but," he replied.

"Good God, I don't intend to make a fuss of you! But I like to have a yarn all the same." He put a hand on Farrar's shoulder.

arm, and under this persuasion, the former reporter got to his feet.

"We can get a taxi in Piccadilly," said the older man—and led the way out of the Green Park.

Hurlbut waited until the meal was over—he was glad to see that his young guest had so far forgotten his former uneasiness as to be able to eat heartily—and now that they were in the book-lined study leading off from the dining-room, and were sitting opposite each other in two easy-chairs before a cheerful fire, he passed over a box of cigars.

"You're not in a hurry, I hope?"

Farrar shook his head.

"No—there is nothing for me to do," he replied bitterly.

The playwright waited. He knew that the information he wanted to get would come to him only if he were patient. And presently this surmise proved correct: Farrar began to talk.

"I feel a swine, Mr. Hurlbut, and if I had had any manners at all, I should have replied to your two letters. Yes, they were forwarded to me all right, but I was ashamed——"

"That's nonsense," came the comment; "I don't know you very well yet—I hope we shall become much better friends in the near future—but I'm quite sure that you've done nothing of which you need to be ashamed. And even if you had, who am I to cast a stone? Why, my dear boy, if I sat down in cold blood and recalled some of the things I did when I was your age, I should be aghast. Youth is the natural time for folly; don't forget that." The words seemed to have a heartening effect upon his listener.

"I'd better tell you all that's happened to me since I saw you last," he said. "Directly I got back to the office—I was still on the *Banner* then, you know—I was given the job of going down to Burminster and reporting the Latimer-Leadbearer Murder Trial."

The playwright nodded.

"Yes, I read your stuff in the *Banner*."

"It was a rotten assignment. You see," speaking more slowly now, "that girl represented my first love-affair."

"Take your time; and if you'd rather not tell me the rest, it doesn't matter."

"Oh, I want to tell you everything now I've started. I ima

gined that I was hard-boiled enough to face anything, thanks to several months' work in Fleet Street, but when it came to reporting that Trial, I went through hell. The paper thought I'd let them down; no doubt I did; so when I got back to the office, they didn't make things too pleasant for me. In the end, I couldn't stick it any longer—and so I resigned. 'Resigned' is perhaps the wrong word; they would have sacked me, in any case; I've no doubt about that. And, to suit their own ends, they spread the yarn in Fleet Street that they'd sent me packing at a moment's notice."

"Dirty business—but, then, the *Banner* isn't a particularly clean paper, is it? It's the old story, anyway; I had to face the same sort of thing when I was in Fleet Street. Go on: what happened then?"

"Well, I was so fed up with the whole business—with Life generally, as a matter of fact—that I left Town the next day. I didn't know where to go or what to do; the only thing I was determined about was not to try to get another job as a reporter. I was fed up with Fleet Street."

"I can understand that."

"I went down to Midhurst in Sussex. I'd always heard it was a pleasant little town, tucked away amidst the hills, and there I found a couple of rooms in a working-man's cottage. I hadn't much money—practically nothing beyond the three months' salary I'd got when they gave me the boot—and so I knew I'd have to be careful. For the first week I just walked about, trying to stabilize myself and my thoughts. The fact that I scarcely spoke to a soul except my landlady during that first week no doubt helped; at any rate, after about ten days or so, I felt I wanted to write again."

Hurlbut smiled.

"Work is always the best panacea for worry—the longer you live, the more you'll realize that, Tom," calling the reporter by his Christian name for the first time. "What did you write?"

"The dog must return to its vomit," was the answer; "I didn't know what else to write but articles for newspapers. They were all returned."

Feeling that there was something more for him to hear, Hurlbut put a question.

"What about your old ambition to write plays?"

"Oh, I was not such a damn fool as to attempt anything of that sort, but I did start on a novel."

Farrar laughed like a man who had become completely disillusioned.

"I suppose it was a legend in Fleet Street when you were there, just the same as it is now, that every sacked reporter is going to earn a fortune by writing fiction?"

Hurlbut disregarded the gibe.

"A novel, eh?" he returned cheerfully; "that sounds interesting. How much have you done?"

"About fifty thousand words—but it's quite hopeless. I shall tear it up."

The playwright spoke sharply.

"You damn young fool, you'll do nothing of the kind! How do you know it's hopeless? Where is the stuff?"

"In my bag in the hall. I came up to town to-day to show it to a publisher who has been fool enough to say he'll read it."

Hurlbut pointed towards the door.

"I'm going to read it first," he said.

"You! But you'd be bored."

"Let me be the best judge of that; go and get your manuscript. I won't promise to read the whole of it, but I can tell you within the first twenty minutes whether the stuff is any good or not. And if it is any good, I'll take it along myself to Hurlinghams', the firm who publishes my plays."

Tom opened his mouth in astonishment. Hurlinghams' were perhaps the most successful publishing house in London. It was a small firm, but everything that bore their imprint was certain of a discriminating public. He could scarcely believe his ears.

"Why are you taking all this trouble?" he heard himself asking.

Hurlbut flicked the ash off his cigar.

"Do you really want to know?" he replied.

"Yes—I feel I ought not to waste your time."

"I'm not a very good hand at wasting time. If I didn't think you were worth it, you wouldn't be here now, I can assure you. But, somehow, I feel that you are, my boy—and you haven't forgotten, have you, that Billy Burnside is one of my greatest friends? Go and get that manuscript."

Tom's cigar had long been smoked. But he continued to sit motionless in his chair. He was afraid to move, lest the spell be broken. He watched fascinatedly the playwright reading rapidly each typewritten page before throwing it to the floor. Over an hour had passed—and still Hurlbut read on.

Twenty minutes later, the last page was on the floor. The playwright looked across at him.

"I don't know much about novel-writing," he said, and each word was like an icy hand laid upon the listener's heart; "so I can't tell you, Tom, whether it's going to be a good book or

ar, spoke out of the bitterness of his soul.

en chuck the muck on the fire!"

lbut shook his head.

u're too impetuous, my boy, if you're not careful that will
 i into serious trouble one day, but, in the meantime, I'm
 o give you my real opinion about this," pointing to the pile
 ritten sheets resting on the carpet to the right of his
 air. "It's not muck; it's damn good stuff."
 it——"

n't you wait to hear what I've got to say? I tell you it's
 ood stuff. Whatever its fate as a novel may be, there is
 story—even in the part I have just read—the plot of a
 ood play—a first-rate melodrama."

ling stupefied, Tom this time did exercise the required
 e. And he had his reward.

you would care to collaborate with me, Tom, I think
 us we could make quite a good job of it. And as it hap-
 -ibb, who runs the Coventry Theatre, rang me up only this
 g to say that he would be prepared to produce anything I
 et him have within the next six weeks. It will be a rush
 if you're willing to give the necessary time——"
 , my God!" exclaimed Farrar.

III

nours of an extraordinary kind were going round the West
 nd by the West End in this particular connection is meant
 erent *habitats* of those catering for, and living on, Show
 is. It is true that extraordinary rumours are the breath of
 uch folk; they are part of their everyday existence; but

these particular specimens created far more than usual concern. For the gist of them all was that Laidley Mortimer must have gone off his head. For what other explanation was possible? Here, reduced to mere words, was the gossip referred to: Laidley Mortimer had agreed to put on a piece in which the star part was to be played by a woman who was not merely an entirely unknown actress, but who was none other than Maud Latimer, the acquitted murderess barred from the screen!

Diligent enquiries showed that the stories were true. This was sensational, but the facts behind the gossip were more sensational still.

The truth was that, in the short space of a month, Maud Latimer had secured a complete domination over her new lover. Laidley Mortimer was crazy about her; nothing else in his life mattered: he proved a willing slave to any of her whims no matter how extravagant the latter were.

And some of these were certainly extravagant.

During the first few days of the rehearsal of Richard Arden's new play, the woman who had already put down £200 of her own money, and was prepared to put down a great deal more, remained comparatively unobtrusive. But she was merely waiting her chance. Already planning a fresh campaign, she proved that at this early stage she had fallen a victim to the insidious back-biting atmosphere of the Theatre. She took every opportunity—and these were many—of filling Mortimer's mind with prejudice against the actress he had selected for the chief rôle. Rosamund Leigh had not been on the stage for over ten years without being aware of what was taking place, and on the fourth morning she stopped her traducer in the empty auditorium and challenged her.

"I don't know exactly what your game is, but if you don't want one hell of a row, you'll stop whispering things behind my back, you rotten bitch! That's all I have to say." With that, she turned on her heel and walked away.

Maud was furious. She would have liked to follow the woman and engaged in a slanging match before the whole company, but Rosamund Leigh had been too quick for her.

But that night, after a very tiring day's rehearsal, she tackled Mortimer again.

"That woman Leigh is useless and you ought to see it," she said; "why, she doesn't even know how to wear her clothes, and her figure is ridiculous. She'll ruin the play. You'll have to get someone else."

In spite of his infatuation, the manager shook his head. "Don't talk nonsense, darling," he replied; "Rosamund may be bad at rehearsals, but she'll be all right on the first night; you leave it to your Uncle" (giving himself the title by which he was often known in the Theatre).

"She'll ruin the play, I tell you," was the rejoinder; "I could do much better myself in the part."

He grinned.

"You?"

"Yes, me! I'm sure I could play that part." This had been the real beginning. There followed a month of such high-powered general tension that even the oldest actors in the cast could not recall anything like it. Everybody connected in the production were soon at screaming-point: the threatened many times not to allow any further rehearsals to take place; several members of the cast resigned; Rosamund Leigh would have returned her contract if she had not known that this was the very thing her implacable enemy desired; whilst a blight appeared to be over everything connected with the show.

What went on behind the scenes after each day's squabbles and arguments, no one apart from Laidley Mortimer and Maud Latimer knew, although many guessed; but the night before the first night had been announced, an alteration was made in the cast: the girl who had had only a few lines to speak at the beginning of rehearsals was now to be the leading lady! Maud Latimer had had her way!

Rosamund Leigh, in a tempest of fury, tore up her programme and scattered the bits on the dusty stage. "To hell with you and your lousy play!" she screamed at Laidley Mortimer; "you've already made yourself the laughing-stock of the West End, and after the first night, that strumpet pointing to Maud Latimer, 'will be the laughing-stock of the whole of London!'"

Hurlbut pretended to be reading his own copy of the script, but actually he was reflecting. Now that he had set out on the task of helping a lame dog over the stile, he was determined to make a thoroughly good job of it. Living entirely alone, and not having a single living relative—that was if he discounted the cousin who had gone to America many years before—he had already made up his mind about Tom Farrar. If the latter were willing, he would treat him as though he were his own son. What was more, he would retire from play-writing himself (he already had more money than he knew what to do with as a bachelor), and would devote himself to launching Farrar as an independent dramatist. The boy had heaps of undeveloped talent; it only wanted bringing out and polishing. Quixotic, perhaps, but once the idea had come to him, he had fastened on to it until it had almost become an obsession. He had written at length to William Burnside, and the latter had replied enthusiastically.

"I always knew you to be a good bloke, Raymond," the minister had said, "but I never imagined for a single moment that you would be as decent as this. Tom will repay you, I feel sure for all your wonderful kindness. Please give him my love, and tell him that nothing short of an earthquake will stop me from being at your First Night."

Maud was in the "star's" dressing-room, making up. Within twenty minutes the curtain would rise on the first act of *Like That*, and she would achieve the ambition which had become such a ravening desire with her.

But, even in spite of her own excitement, she could not banish from her mind the thought that in the very next theatre on Shaftesbury Avenue, another new play was being shown to the public that very night. And, what was more, by a coincidence of that other play was Tom Farrar, the boy she now knew to be the only person she had ever really loved!

Extracts from the *Daily Meteor*, London's most trusted evening newspaper from a theatre-goer's point of view.

(I)

.....*"Life is Like That."* Mr. Richard Arden, who has had so many successes in the London Theatre during the past few years, deserves this time the public sympathy. His latest piece (presented by Mr. Laidley Mortimer at the Majestic Theatre last night), containing, as it does, the usual number of bright line and clever stage situations of an Arden play, was ruined last night by a variety of reasons. Foremost amongst these must be placed a singularly unfortunate piece of casting in the leading rôle : Maud Latimer, who essayed the part, is, we believe, a newcomer to the stage. She has beauty of face and figure, a fair speaking voice and a graceful pose, but it was obvious from last night's performance that she has no knowledge whatever of stage technique. Added to this blunder on the part of the management, it must be stated that the production left much to be desired. The audience became sharply divided at the fall of the final curtain, and there were some regrettable scenes on the part of the occupants of the cheaper seats. Altogether a sad evening.

(II)

.....*"Man's Enemy,"* produced at the Coventry Theatre last night, scored such a substantial success that even a playwright so experienced in stage triumphs as Mr. Raymond Hurlbut must have felt gratified. But not all the credit for an outstanding evening's entertainment—this piece is a melodrama of the very best type—goes to Mr. Hurlbut; for on this occasion he took a collaborator. The latter, Mr. Tom Farrar, was not long ago a Fleet Street reporter. But even if Mr. Farrar had only a minor part in the writing of *"Man's Enemy,"* he should be able to look forward confidently to a successful career as a dramatist. We congratulate him on making such a happy début as a writer for the Stage.

"Man's Enemy" is a triumph ; it should pack the Coventry Theatre for months to come.

v

The whole of Theatrical London read these notices, and different people reacted in different ways. The professional "knockers," whose sole object in life was to spread gloom and

depression, dismissed the triumph at the Coventry Theatre, and concentrated on the "flop" at the adjoining theatre. Rival managers of Laidley Mortimer shook their heads in hypocritical condolence, but secretly decided that "the fool had asked for what he had got."

There were many painful scenes enacted by the different members of the cast, all of whom, without any exception, blamed the failure on the woman who, by reason of the money she had invested in the play, had been allowed to take the leading rôle, although almost equal criticism was levelled at Mortimer himself. That a man of his experience and of his age and knowledge of the world, could have committed such a colossal blunder as to permit this travesty of casting seemed incomprehensible.

"What I can't understand is why the author allowed it Llewellyn James, who played the Father in *Life is Like That*, said to his wife after pushing the *Daily Meteor* disgustedly one side; "Richard Arden is a successful playwright, and should have stood up to Mortimer. If the latter had persisted in pushing that creature into the leading part, then he should have taken play away."

"He threatened to do so—I heard him say so myself times," was the reply, "but if he had taken his play away would never have got it produced anywhere else; you know managers are: if it had been written by Shakespeare himself wouldn't have touched it with a barge-pole. They would have said it stank."

Her husband nodded gloomily.

"I know. Well, I'll give it a week at the most...I won't live to be got on the Stage."

The speaker had reason for his despondency; his part in *Life is Like That* was the first stage work he had had for months. If it hadn't been for the films, for which in days he had professed so much contempt, he would have been a star.

The most painful scene of all connected with the production of *Life is Like That* took place in the sitting-room of Latimer's flat in Duchess Street, to which she had come directly she had come under Laidley Mortimer's "protection."

After reading the notice of the play in every paper (they all said more or less what the *Daily*

printed), Maud curtly ordered Laidley Mortimer on the telephone to come over and see her at once.

When the manager arrived, he looked as though he had not slept the previous night. This was the truth. Too late, he realized where his infatuation had led him—to the very brink of ruin. No one would have any further faith in his judgment after this *débâcle*—every dramatists' agent in town would refuse to send him a script that was any good—and, so far as the play-going public was concerned, this fourth failure in a row would keep them away from anything he might put on.

So this was the End. And he owed it all to his sensual folly. He had bartered his professional reputation for a woman's body. It had been a beautiful body, it was true—but that didn't alter the argument; there were thousands of women's bodies to be bought in London, but only a man who had temporarily lost all his senses would consider losing a lifetime's reputation for any one of them.

As a result of these thoughts, he had got out of the taxi at the door of the flat in a black and bitter mood. And, when he stood face to face with the woman who had brought him ruin, he carried the battle into the enemy's camp.

"Well," he snapped, "you asked for it—and, by God, you've got it!" He turned his eyes from her face to the pile of newspapers lying crumpled on the floor.

She, too, wasted no words.

"Get out of here!" she cried; "you're cad enough, like those damned critics, to blame it all off on me! I'll see you damned yet, the whole lot of you! Get out of here!" she cried once more. "I never want to see your ugly face again!"

He spat at her as he left. Laidley Mortimer, born Alfred Smith, had reverted to type.

CHAPTER NINE

SHAFTESBURY AVENUE

I

TOM FARRAR read the final words and placed the script on the arm of his easy-chair.

Burnside was the first to speak.

"I don't pretend to be an expert on plays even when they are acted, but I know that it held me from beginning to end. What's your opinion, Raymond?"

The man whose recent retirement from writing for the Theatre had been greeted with expressions of regret by practically every newspaper that had recorded it, gave a characteristic, half-mocking smile.

"It's not so bad," he said; "yes, I think it will do. Tom knows how to put his stuff across." He reached over and placed a hand affectionately on Farrar's arm. "Congratulations, my boy!"

The Rev. William Burnside—the third member of the small party met at Raymond Hurlbut's flat in Lincoln's Inn, to hear the reading of the first play that Tom Farrar had written entirely off his own bat—leaned back in his chair and blew a cloud of tobacco smoke towards the ceiling.

"And to think it's all been done in about four years!" he commented. "I don't say, Tom, you don't deserve it, but do you ever stop to think what a lucky young devil you are? To be both a comparatively rich man, and one of London's most successful playwrights at twenty-seven! Why, there's been nothing like it since Noel Coward burst upon the scene!"

The man he addressed pointed to Raymond Hurlbut.

"You ought to be talking to Raymond," he replied, a deep undercurrent of seriousness in his voice; "whatever I've done, and whatever luck I have had—and I admit I've had heaps—are all due to him."

"That's the sheerest drip," came the reply; "since we've started scratching each other's backs, a nauseating practice, let me tell you, young feller-me-lad, I must say that if I hadn't

both. Seeing you two makes up for a lot of disappointments I have had with other people."

"There goes the best bloke I've ever known!" remarked Hurlbut, when the door had closed behind the visitor.

"Yes," supported Tom; "Burnside always makes me feel there really must be a God."

Walking through the crowded streets to his flat in the Albany Tom's thoughts returned to the past, and when he finally found himself in his own comfortable quarters, he was still thinking of the old grubby days in Burminster instead of the radiant present.

It had been Hurlbut's remark about him going around with a girl which had caused him to dip into the days that were gone beyond recall, and these, in turn, had forced the image of the girl he had once loved back into his mind.

Where was Maud Latimer now? What had happened to her? Many stories had been circulated since that tragic first night of the Richard Arden play in which, playing the leading part, she had been booed by the Pit and Gallery on the fall of the final curtain. Breaking with Laidley Mortimer, she had produced a number of other shows herself—all failures—until she had been declared bankrupt. After that her name had been linked with a notoriously profligate Indian Prince. They had lived together until a scandal which would have lifted the lid off the West End if it had not been hushed up for State reasons, caused a separation. After that? Well, the further stories were conflicting; some said that she had gone to America, where she had married a simple-minded multi-millionaire; others declared that she was the favourite of a famous Italian statesman. The important thing was that she had apparently vanished from London. In any case, he had never seen her again: a fact for which he was very thankful, for he wondered, whenever the possibility of him doing so had occurred to him, what he should say to her.

III

The pavement outside the Coventry Theatre in Shaftesbury Avenue was crammed. The First Night of *The Man Who Wasn't Himself* had brought a more than usually inquisitive

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